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THE MISTRESS OF QUEST

ADELINE SERGEANT

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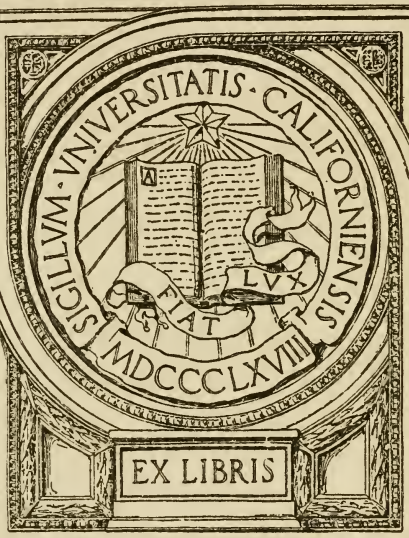

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THE MISTRESS OF QUEST

A NOVEL

BY

ADELINE SERGEANT

AUTHOR OF THE SURRENDER OF MARGARET BELLARMINE,
THE STORY OF A PENITENT SOUL, UNDER FALSE PRETENCES, ETC.

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THE MISTRESS OF QUEST.

CHAPTER I.

QUEST.

Hill and valley lay silent in the baking heat of a sultry summer afternoon. There was no breeze, not even on the fell, where usually a light wind was wafted in the hottest days of July. But on this day the branches of the larches and rowan trees drooped motionless over the waters of the Force, and they themselves seemed to trickle languidly, as if their life were half extinguished by the summer drought. The sky was cloudless, and the rugged sides of the mountains seemed actually to quiver in the sunlight. Every fragment of flint on the roadside glittered like a diamond; the black and purple tints of the moorland were transfigured in a golden haze.

It was a day such as comes only now and then to the wild Cumberland fell-sides, and it touched even the sullen tarns among the mountain fastnesses and the bare stretches of upland, scanty in pasture, yellowed by the heat, to a new beauty and a splendour of colour such as no artist would fail to recognise.

High up among the hills, just between two great ascending spurs, with a background of receding mountains, and a sloping space before it, stood a grey stone house, with a low roof and quaint little dormer windows. A mountain stream dashed past it, with many a little natural fall and break, on its way from the tarns among the hills, to join the river in the valley far below. This stream was edged with low-

growing trees, willow, mountain ash, and elder tree; but there were no "forest kings" in the vicinity, and the house stood bare and square without shadowing verdure of any kind. But for at least part of the day it lay in the shadow of the great hill on one of its sides, and was preserved therefore from the glare; and the garden that stretched in front of it was a glow of bloom.

Hardy annuals grew there freely, and at present the glory of the farmhouse garden was a mass of phlox, in different shades of crimson, pink, and white—a mass of colour which almost filled the beds, and left little room for any other plant to display itself. But there were other flowers, less pretentious, but sweet and homely, in the corners of the garden and under the grey stone walls. Mignonette grew lavishly, and honeysuckle climbed about the stones; tiger-lilies in a stately row were not yet over, and sunflowers and hollyhocks scarcely in blossom gave ample promise of glories yet to come. Near the porch and over it, a great bush of traveller's joy had spread, and twined, and twisted from time immemorial; strangers stopped to look at it as they went past, for it was rumoured to be as old as the house itself, and the house had been built in its original form some three hundred years ago.

Quest, the place was called, and few knew how or why. An antiquarian was reported to have said that it had once been called Quest Royal, and had been built as a sort of keeper's lodge in days when mighty hunters came that way. Who the royal personages might be who looked for sport in the wilds of Cumberland in its confessedly savage times he could not undertake to say. Its owner, Farmer Verrall, settled the matter as far as he was concerned by declaring with a great laugh that neither kings nor princes had ever come his way, and that as the house had been called in his great-grandfather's day, so it should be called in his, please God. And he did not see why people should hunt about for reasons of things that had always been, and always would be. Whence it may be seen that Farmer Verrall was a man of what is sometimes termed "the old school."

Verrall was in reality deeply attached to his old house. He loved every stick and stone of it—from the queer old weathercock on the gable, and the carved date and initials on the stone above the doorway, to the crumbling wainscot panelling in the more ancient rooms, and the stone work about the narrow latticed windows. The house had been enlarged more than once, and stood much in the shape of the letter L : the shorter end forming the old and foremost portion of the building, the long line of the letter being made by a newer wing. It was a roomier old place than it at first appeared ; and it had the advantage—not much appreciated by its occupants—of possessing a magnificent view of the valley below. The panorama on a clear bright day of sloping moorland, of rich pasture, through which ran the silver river on whose banks a grey little town with its spires and towers was picturesquely placed, was exceedingly beautiful, and formed a great contrast to the beetle-browed crags at the foot of which, or amongst which, rather, stood the old farmhouse of Quest.

The farm buildings were further back, not readily to be distinguished at a little distance from the purple-grey slates of the hill against which they were set. Usually there was a great appearance of life about the place; birds and beasts made a pleasant clatter ; men and maids came and went; the doors stood hospitably open, and there was a ready welcome for any toiling passer-by who liked to ask for a drink of milk and a crust of bread. But on this afternoon there was not a sound stirring. Perhaps the heat had silenced the cheerful voices, and stayed the too eager steps. If the observer had looked a little more closely, however, he might have divined that sickness or sorrow had given rise to this unusual stillness, rather than the heat of the day. In one room the blind was down, the sash of the window raised, the white curtains seen to be flapping a little as a faint breeze got up. The faces of the servants, occasionally appearing at door or window, were still and silent : the farm labourers avoided the house as much as possible. Something at Quest was very much amiss.

Once a little boy of six or seven years old ran out into the yard with a toy in his hand, and stood bareheaded in the sunshine. He was a lean, lank little fellow, with plenty of muscle for his age, and a shock of fair hair above his deep-set eyes;—not a very prepossessing child, but curiously different from the average farmer's offspring in that district. Yet it was Farmer Verrall's only son, and he was not unlike his father. He stood there for some time, pouting and frowning, as if vexed at something which had just occurred; and even the advent of an old labourer in a smock-frock, with a pitchfork over his shoulder, did not disturb him.

A buxom servant girl appeared at the kitchen door at that moment, and to her the labourer addressed himself in a subdued tone.

"How goes it, Kezia?"

Kezia shook her head. "Ah reckon hoo'll last till sundown," she replied.

"Hech!" The old man made a guttural click in his throat, to express regret.

"Hoo was a gradely lass," he murmured, as he turned away.

"Zadock," said Kezia, sharply, but still in a subdued voice, "what art a-doin' oot i' this fell heat? Coom thy way in."

Zadock turned his sullen grey eyes upon her, but did not move.

"Coom in, luve, an' ah'll gie thee a caake," said Kezia, trying the coaxing vein.

Still Zadock did not budge.

"Ah marvel at thee being a bad boy—trouble in the hoose an' all. Tha sister'll be dead afore night, an' mebbe thou'll be sorry."

For all answer to this, the boy ran straight from her into the deep cool recesses of the barn, where he knew that he was safe from Kezia even if she followed him; for she could not track him through certain intricacies of a way which he had made for himself into a loft, and there he hid himself completely.

"Such a limb o' Satan ah never saw," said Kezia, returning to her kitchen, and detailing her experiences.

Meanwhile Zadock waited until her steps had died away upon the flagstones before proceeding to bury his face in the hay and cry outright. Kezia had never seen him cry in that way since he was born—not even when his father had taken the big cart-whip to him for telling a lie. Old Verrall was a Puritan in grain, rigid and inflexible to the core, and Zadock resembled him, point by point, in temperament and characteristics. The boy was scarcely ever known to shed a tear.

But now he wept vigorously, with short, hardly suppressed cries, and choking sobs, and contortions of his limbs —only as a child weeps in some great agony. There was little noise about his grief; the heaving sighs, the bitter tears, were almost silent, even if vehement. It was long before he grew calm, and then he lay for some time face downward in the hay, without answering one or two muffled calls that came to him from the yard.

By this time the sun was declining, and its rays lay long and level along the hillsides, emphasising every blazing stone, every scorched tuft of grass, and every low wall, with black lines of shadow, which gradually grew softer and less distinct. A golden beam found its way through an aperture in the wooden wall of the place where Zadock had found refuge. He lifted his head and stared at it. He knew what it meant. The sun was going down. And Kezia had said that his sister, whom he called Lizzy, and whom her husband with his new-fangled ways always addressed as Lisa, would die at sundown. He accepted Kezia's verdict as infallible. Of course Lizzy would die—his beloved Lizzy, who was always sweet and beautiful and good, she would die and go to heaven; and he, being a bad, wicked boy, as everybody told him in his little world, would go to hell. He should never see her any more.

The desolation of his soul was so great at this thought that he would have cried again had not his mind received a new impression. He heard swift wheels approaching the

farmhouse. They came from the valley—they belonged then to the doctor's dogcart. Perhaps the doctor could do Lizzy some good. Perhaps he would say she was not going to die. He scrambled out of his nest among the hay, and, still unconsciously clasping his toy cart under his arm, he scrambled along the beams, dropped on the wooden partition, and, after hanging for a moment by both hands to the top, let himself down to the ground.

As he ran out the doctor was entering at the gate. He was a kindly-looking, weather-beaten man, with grey hair and whiskers, rather ponderous in his movements, but conveying in some mysterious way a conviction that he was a man whom you could trust. Zadock Verrall knew this quite well, although he was not eight years old. He ran up to Dr. Spencer, tugged at his coat-tails, and breathlessly asked his question—

"My Lizzy! Be she going to die?"

Kezia would have rebuked him for hard-heartedness; the doctor knew better. He looked at the sturdy little figure in its blue blouse and hob-nailed boots, with the toy cart crushed under its arm; at the tousled mop of hair, in which dust and hay-seed and straw were conspicuous; at the swollen eyelids and rosy face, all disfigured by much crying, and he answered with a touch of tenderness which he had never thought to show the boy who was the veriest imp of mischief in the country side.

"God's going to take her home, my lad," he said, seriously, and not without some moisture in his eye.

"She've got a whoame here wi' us," said the boy, pausing.

"Ah, well," said Dr. Spencer, more to himself than to Zadock, "we think little enough of that other one, without a doubt. Here, my boy, do you want to see Lizzy again?"

Zadock nodded: his throat was too full for speech.

"Come up with me, then—very softly, mind; if you make a noise you'll be put out."

"I wean't make noa noise," said Zadock, gruffly. At last he remembered his toy, threw it down on the ground, and

followed the doctor. When, at the bedroom door, Dr. Spencer looked round he saw the childish face set into so exact an image of his father's grim features that he lifted his eyebrows in amaze, and spoke no further warning word. "One can trust a lad who looks like that," was the thought that glimmered through the doctor's mind.

Elizabeth Lorimer, the farmer's married daughter, lay dying. She was only nineteen years of age, and she had scarcely been married a full year. Her short life had been a very happy one, and she seemed as full of vigour as of beauty. She was certainly a very beautiful woman; but the vigour had perhaps been more apparent than real, for she was sinking into her grave from sheer exhaustion after the birth of her little girl. Zadock, who had not seen her for many days, hardly knew her now that she was so white, so wan, with such blue tints about the pinched mouth and nose, such violet shadows on the half-closed eyelids. If he had not given his promise to be quiet, he would have called out —"That is not my Lizzy; not my Lizzy at all. Where have you taken sister Liz?"

The dying woman's husband was kneeling beside her, with his head buried in the bedclothes. It was not necessary for him to lift his face to betray the fact that he was "a gentleman": no common yeoman of the wolds and fells. The way he wore his rough clothes, the way his hair was cut, the whiteness of his hands, his very posture, in spite of his want of self-restraint, betrayed him. He was sobbing now—sobbing aloud, and murmuring incoherent curses or prayers: nobody could quite tell what; and his wife's pale hand rested softly on his black curly hair. James Lorimer was an artist by profession, and he had the artistic temperament: that is to say, he was easily swayed by gusts of passion, and by fitful storms of love or hate. He had been desperately in love with the farmer's daughter, whom he had wooed and won; and had been quite content, after a winter abroad, to spend spring and summer at her father's house. But now she was dying, after this one short year of happiness: no power on earth could save her; and Lorimer

sounded a gulf of despair which hitherto he had never known.

"Jim!" the feeble voice sounded at last; and he checked his sobs to listen. "Jim!"

"Yes, my own darling."

"I'm going, Jim. . . . You won't forget me?"

"Never—never—never!"

"We've been very happy, Jim. Tell father so. Father . . . you don't know how happy I've been. It seems—rather hard—to go."

There was a moment's silence in the room. The cry of a baby's voice was suddenly heard, and Lisa opened her eyes widely and looked from face to face.

"Bring me my baby," she said almost imperiously. "I want to see her again. Please bring her, nurse."

The tiny red-faced creature was laid beside her, and she looked at it with a wistful little smile.

"Do you think she will be—like me—when she grows up?" she asked. "What is her name to be, Jim?"

"We call it after you, Lisa. It was christened Elizabeth."

"You will remember me—by her," she said faintly, and closed her eyes again. When she opened them, they fell full upon her half-brother, Zadock, who was standing at the foot of the bed, regarding her pallid face with awe. A look of comprehension came into the dying woman's eyes. Next to Jim, it was Zadock who wanted comfort most.

"Let Zadock come here—close to me," she whispered. "Zadock, do you see—the baby—my little baby?"

Zadock nodded assent.

"You love me, don't you, Zadock? I want you to love baby, too. You'll be good to baby, will you not?"

"Yes," said Zadock, with a gulp. He had always hated babies before, but he would love this one for Lizzy's sake.

"Kiss me," said the dying girl, with a happy smile; and then she let them take the babe away from her, and turned her face once more to her husband's longing eyes. But the

change had come: her last request was spoken, her farewell kiss bestowed. Zadock had had both, and he never lost the memory of either. She died at sundown, with her husband's hand in hers.

CHAPTER II.

BABY LISBETH'S PROTECTOR.

THE Gap, as the spot where Quest stood was called, had attained a certain amount of celebrity among landscape painters, on account of the exquisite views of hill and vale which could be obtained in its vicinity. The reputation of the place had brought James Lorimer, a young and rising artist, to spend a summer among the Cumberland fells; and it was here that he met Lizzy Verrall, the daughter of Farmer Verrall of Quest. From the first moment he fell wildly in love with her, and lost no time in apprising her of his love. Lizzy was very simple, very loving, very dutiful: she would not for the world have married James Lorimer if her father had disapproved; but she had not to meet with the opposition that she feared.

John Verrall, shrewd in his way, was not very worldly-wise ; and it seemed to him that he was rather condescending to James Lorimer by giving him his daughter, than advancing her interests in any respect. He liked the young man in a friendly, patronising sort of way : Lorimer seemed to have no vices ; he neither smoked, swore, drank, or flirted : he was absorbed in his art and in his love for Lizzy. He had one hundred and fifty pounds a year of his own, and he could sometimes—as he modestly said—manage to sell a picture. He promised to bring Lizzy back to her father's house every year, for three months if not for six ; and after some very little hesitation the farmer yielded to his daughter's solicitations, and the marriage took place.

It was by no means an unsuccessful marriage. There was love on both sides. And Lizzy—or Lisa, as James Lori-

mer always called her—was of a very receptive nature, easily moulded into the semblance of culture and social usage. Refinement she possessed by nature to an uncommon degree ; and it speaks well for her tact that never once did James Lorimer find himself incommoded by mistakes, by misapprehension, by jealousy or ill temper on his wife's part. Indeed, she had a really fine nature of peculiar calmness and discrimination ; but her husband, lost in admiration of her hair and eyes and complexion, valued her moral and mental character much less than her beauty, and even when he sorrowed for her most, never realised the full extent of his loss.

After the winter abroad, Lorimer had brought his wife to Quest, as he had promised the farmer he would do. She had particularly wanted her baby to be born at Quest. And Lorimer liked the place : he made plenty of his light, bright, amateurish sketches of fell side scenery while he was in the neighbourhood, and he amused himself by occasional excursions to the bigger towns of the county. Lisa was calmly happy in her old home.

When her husband was absent, she made a companion of her half-brother, Zadock, and won his heart to a more passionate devotion to her than to any other person in the world—not excepting his own mother. The second Mrs. Verrall was a placid, comfortable, characterless person, who was not likely to impress her individuality very strongly on anybody. Zadock, hitherto unruly and unmanageable, was completely under Lisa's control; and her death was as great a grief and loss to him as any child of his age could be called on to undergo.

Dreary beyond description were the days that intervened between the death and the funeral of poor Elizabeth Lorimer. The old farmer was as broken-hearted as the husband. The very servants went about with tears in their eyes and solemn looks upon their faces. Quest would never be the same place again, they opined, "after this." And certainly to James Lorimer it could never be the same.

He said as much to John Verrall, when the funeral was

over, and the two men sat together late at night in the great kitchen or "houseplace," where the huge rafters and beams of the roof, the heavy wooden furniture, the shining tins and crockery, the red-flagged floor, and yellow-washed walls were in turn illuminated by a flash of flame that crept up between the red-hot smouldering peat with which the grate was half-filled.

The farmer always smoked his pipe by this fire before going to bed; sometimes, indeed, he sat there half the evening, but James Lorimer seldom joined him. The little parlour was intolerable to him; but Lisa, with a keen appreciation of her husband's temperament, and her husband's needs, had turned one of the upper rooms into a studio for him—a really charming studio—rough, indeed, but picturesque, with a good light and plenty of space for movement; and here in the evenings Lorimer usually sat with her and smoked a cigarette. It was the remembrance of these evenings that made even the studio unbearable to him now. He preferred the kitchen, and the old man's pipe. Something also of the community of sorrow drew the hearts of the two men together.

"Ay," said the farmer, with a long-drawn breath, "Quest 'll be a changed place now, it will."

His accent was provincial, but not utterly rustic, like that of the men on the farm. Lorimer used to think it villainous, but he stopped to notice that it did not grate upon him now.

"I can't bear to stay here," said the young man, his head resting on his hands. "I feel as if I should go mad—to stay—where she lived and died—and is buried—God in Heaven! don't you all look upon me as a murderer? I wonder you didn't cast me into the grave along with her—I wish you had!"

"It is the Lord that gave, and the Lord that taketh away," said the farmer, solemnly; "blessed be the name of the Lord. Young man, it would be better for thee to go away for a time—to travel in strange lands, and leave us here with our dead. I should have borne thee a grudge, lad,

if thou hadst laid our girl far away from us. We fell-folk like to keep together, in life or death."

"There is no place I care to go to," said Lorimer, lifting his head a little, and staring sullenly into the fire. He had not heard half that Farmer Verrall had said.

"I heard talk of Algery, or some such outlandish place," said the farmer, after a pause.

"Yes—with her—with her. Don't you see that it makes all the difference? How can I bear to go alone? It is nothing to me without her—without my Lisa."

The farmer was silent. Lorimer's passionate, uncontrolled grief was mysterious to him. He himself could hardly say a word about his own, and yet his heart was heavy with the sense of loss. "Thee'd best go, lad," he said, with rough kindness. "Lizzy'd think none the more o' thee for making thyself miserable. Go and travel about a bit, and paint thy pictures, if thee will. If th' hast no money, take mine. My purse is open to thee, for Lizzy's sake."

"You were always kind, Mr. Verrall," said Lorimer, vehemently. "Kinder than I deserve. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. But I've got as much money as I want—for the present. It's the child I've been thinking of; what am I to do with the child?"

The farmer pondered. "Thee's got no kith or kin—sisters, aunts, and so on—as would like to rear it for thee?"

"Not one. Not one I can ask, at any rate," said Lorimer, hastily.

"It beats me, then," said Verrall, slowly, "to know why thee dostn't leave it here. Mother 'ud be fain to see after it."

"Leave it here?" said Jim Lorimer. "Leave it here?"

He had not thought of that. He had already been vaguely impatient of the vista of possibilities opening out before him—the prospect of a nursery establishment, of a nurse, of a baby's requirements. What was he to do—a man to whom marriage even had brought no peculiarly sobering domestic influence—as a young widower with a motherless infant? The situation might have its pathos; but for Jim Lorimer

there was something in it of the ridiculous, too. Domesticity had never been his line.

To leave the child here, at the farmhouse, where she would probably be the centre of love and care such as could not be bought, such as could not possibly be procured for her elsewhere: was not this the best solution of the difficulty? True, there was the roughness of the life, the want of refinement, to be faced; but if this had not hurt Lisa, why should it hurt Lisa's child? Besides, Lorimer reflected, when the little girl was three or four years old, he could take her away from Quest and send her to board elsewhere, until she was old enough to go to a first-rate London school.

He closed gratefully, therefore, with Farmer Verrall's offer. He would leave Baby Elizabeth with Mrs. Verrall for a few months, at least, while he went abroad. He remarked, dismally enough, that life had lost its savour to him, and that he might behold all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them without any appreciable result; but the farmer, being a shrewd man, shook his head a little over this sentiment, and without opposing it in words, said to himself that the day would come when Jim Lorimer would think differently. For, after all, he was but twenty-three, and he had been Lisa's husband something less than one short year.

So, in a few days, Lorimer departed, after a passion of grief over his baby's cradle, which won him the heart of every woman at Quest. Curiously enough, it did not win him the heart of one of Lisa's sincerest mourners, the small Zadock, who was discovered by Kezia in the act of aiming a stone at Lorimer's horse as he rode away.

"What's that for, tha bad boy?"

"Cause I hates him," said Zadock.

"Thee ought to love him; tha sister loved him."

Whereupon Zadock scandalised the women-folk by shouting loudly——"

"Ay, but *he* don't love her."

"Aw, then, harken to th' bad boy!"

"He didn't love her," said Zadock, obstinately, "an'

he doan't love baby, neither; an' he'll forget 'em to-morrer."

Mrs. Verrall was so much shocked, when these observations were repeated to her, that, mild woman as she usually was, she formally requested her husband to give Zadock "the stick," and was a little aggrieved when the farmer, for once in a way, declined.

"Zadock's got more sense sometimes than those that be older," he remarked sententiously. And Mrs. Verrall was obliged to hold her peace.

For one thing, she said, she could not be too thankful—that Zadock had taken such a fancy to the baby. If he had been its enemy, Mrs. Verrall knew well that the household would have no peace. Zadock was as mischievous as he was strong and clever; and not without fits of malice and naughtiness in which he was the despair of his friends. But, as it happened, the baby was received into his especial favour, and he considered himself her particular friend and defender. Before the child was two years old she had come to know that Zadock was not only her friend and protector but her slave. And for her sake it also became evident that Zadock would exert himself to be "good." What neither parent nor schoolmaster could effect in subduing a particularly rebellious disposition, was managed without the slightest difficulty by a baby girl.

There was a great storm when Jim Lorimer visited Quest again, because Kezia had declared that "Baby 'Lisbeth" would have to go away with him. Zadock raged and sulked alternately for hours, until it was discovered, to the relief of every one concerned, that Mr. Lorimer did not want his baby daughter in the very least, nor was he anxious to remove her from the Verralls' care. Whereupon, the cloud was lifted from Zadock's brow, and all the household breathed again.

This was when "Lisbeth," as they called her, was three years old, and it was the first visit that Lorimer had paid to the Verralls since his wife's death. He gave no explanation and vouchsafed no excuses for his long absence and

silence ; but when Mrs. Verrall inquired anxiously whether he wished to take the child away with him he started, flushed deeply, and asked if she were tired of her charge.

"Not a bit," said Mrs. Verrall, rather indignantly, "but I thought ye'd be wanting your own child !"

"It's not always so easy for a man to arrange," Jim began ; and the good woman took up the sentence with a touch of self-reproach in her tone.

"No, it's not ; special-like for a widow-man." And she wondered why he blushed again so deeply and made a sudden movement of impatience. "We'll keep her, an' welcome, Mr. Lorimer"—Mrs. Verrall had never ventured to call him Jim—"and hopes you think she does us credit."

"Certainly she does," said Lorimer, not unkindly. But his tone was devoid of tenderness. He was a much harder-looking man now than when he wept over his baby's cradle three years before.

The child was certainly beautiful—well-featured, clear-complexioned, with magnificent eyes and curly rings of dark hair : fat, clean, rosy, evidently of splendid physique in every way ; but, to Jim's thinking, absolutely unlike her dead mother. And this was—to Jim Lorimer—half a disappointment, half a relief.

He had idealised Lisa, without knowing it, during the last three years. She had come to mean something between an angel and a heroine of romance to him. He forgot that she had ever had red hands or spoken bad grammar. She was grace, beauty, perfection incarnate ; and her daughter ought to be just like her too.

Jim found Lisbeth quite an ordinary child.

She had a deplorable accent, and a ragged frock, and her hair was all over her eyes. She was not like his Lisa at all ; she was rough, common, coarse. And, on the whole, he had come to the conclusion that he liked a fair style rather than a dark style of beauty ; not that there was any beauty in Lisbeth to admire.

He insisted on paying certain sums of money for her maintenance, and went away, promising to return very

shortly. But a somewhat untoward accident which happened at this juncture perhaps helped to make him more and more unwilling to return to Quest.

As he was leaving the house, Zadock stood in waiting at the gate. He did not try this time to throw a stone at Lorimer's horse; he was older now, and did what was worse instead—threw a jeering word.

"I allus said *you* didn't care for our Lizzy," he called out, defiantly, although Baby Lisbeth was clinging to his hand, and Mrs. Verrall was looking over the garden wall.

Jim Lorimer turned white with wrath. It was possibly not to be wondered at that he lifted his riding-whip and struck the boy: he was not a man of any self-restraint, and the lad's words had an unfortunate sting in them. But he struck carelessly, and more heavily than he knew. When he rode off, Zadock was lying in the road, with the blood flowing from a cut in the head. But Mrs. Verrall had rushed out to her boy's assistance, and Lorimer had waited to make a slight apology, and to see him return to consciousness. He had fallen on a flint and cut himself—it was not Lorimer's blow that had done mischief, and neither Farmer Verrall nor his wife ever thought of blaming Jim Lorimer in the affair.

But the unfortunate thing was that Zadock was never quite the same after that accident as he had been before. A sort of cloud seemed to settle down upon him: a dulness and depression which could not be defined. The simple folk at Quest did not recognise it as illness: they did not connect it particularly with Zadock's fall and Jim Lorimer's blow; but they spoke of it as occurring after Lorimer's last visit, without following out any sequence of cause or effect. Zadock was a good lad in these dull days—a far better-behaved lad than he would have been without Jim Lorimer's blow, but he had not the same force and fire, the same brightness and activity of mind.

Lorimer came again when Lisbeth was eight years old; found her a sunburnt, rampant, hoyden of a girl, with plenty of muscular development, and no education at all, retired in

disgust, and never returned. Farmer Verrall lost, or mistook his address, and finally gave up all hope or desire of hearing from him. Lisbeth was "his girl, not Lorimer's," he declared; and not all the fathers in the world should step in now to take the girl away from Quest.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCENE CHANGES.

It was a London drawing-room in a West-End square. Not the most fashionable of squares, but a respectable square: one which seemed intended to represent the quintessence of conventional prosperity and propriety. The houses were mostly of stone, with black doors ornamented by polished brass handles and knockers, and furnished with enormous lamps over the doorway. In summer, when the balconies were filled with flowers, and the enclosure inside the square was green with foliage, the houses looked cheerful enough; but in a November fog few places can pretend to cheerfulness, and Croyland Square was no exception to this rule. The air was dark and heavy: the leafless boughs of the trees had a melancholy air, and the want of colour and life which characterised the appearance of most of the houses was decidedly depressing.

Once inside the black doors, in many cases, the scene was absolutely changed. Brightness, warmth, comfort, were all to be found inside the grey stone walls, with their sombre narrow windows outlined in black, and their dripping, dreary porticoes. Enter the door of number twenty-one, for instance, and you passed at once from London in November to a veritable fairy-land.

All had been done that could be done by way of excluding fog, regulating temperature, emulating sunshine. The electric lights were softened by shades of amber and rose-colour: the numerous gauze-like hangings in palest rose and

silver tints were renewed so frequently that they had no time to be spoiled by London smuts. There was a perfume of flowers up and down the softly-carpeted stairs: the tinkle of water sounded from a fountain in the conservatory, and a twitter of birds' voices showed the existence of an aviary. From some unseen corner came the long-continued cooing of turtle doves. Nothing met eye or ear but what was pleasant, soothing, and harmonious. The decorations of the house had been chosen with exquisite skill, and one of its best-known decorations consisted in the pictures which hung upon the walls. They were of some value, but had been chosen with less regard to their money worth than to some quality of taste, colour, light, or shade which had made them exactly the right thing to be hung in the artistically-furnished house of the well-known landscape painter, James Lorimer, A. R. A.

On this dull afternoon in November the house was very full of light and warmth. The master had given orders that daylight should be excluded as soon as possible, coloured lamps lighted, a fountain set spraying scented water among the flowers. His tastes were sensuous: he hated everything that reminded him of coldness, bleakness, barrenness; and yet, he disliked all that seemed to be glaring or unsubdued. The people who did his bidding always felt that they walked upon egg-shells. With a man whose tastes were so essentially delicate and refined, yet, in a sense, so florid, it was almost impossible sometimes to find the exact medium between garish splendour and barren plainness.

In the little ante-room which lay between the dining-room and the conservatory, on the ground floor, Alys Lorimer stood and considered the question of her father's tastes. They had never come very prominently before her until within the last few months. She had been at school, or with friends in foreign places. It was only since her eighteenth birthday that she had been told that her father wanted her at home. She was not yet nineteen, and she was wondering whether she liked her present life or not.

A footstep on the stair that led from the drawing-room

floor to the conservatory—a contrivance of Mr. Lorimer's own—caused her to look up, and then to change colour. Between the tall palms and orange plants that fringed the steps she saw the alert figure and brown head of a man who had been visiting her father, but who, in spite of that formal visit to Mr. Lorimer, was, as Alys put it to herself, "her own particular friend." She did not move, but a slight smile played about the corners of her lips for a moment, although, by the time that Edmund Creighton reached her side, it had faded away, and left her fair face rather unusually grave.

"I was hoping that I should find you here," said the young man. He was the junior partner in a firm of solicitors, who had long had the management of Mr. Lorimer's business. It was a very good position for a man of seven or eight and twenty; but one, the world agreed to add, of which Edmund Creighton was fully worthy. He was honest and he was clever—two valuable qualifications for a lawyer. He was also good-looking, he had charming manners, and he was a favourite with men as well as women. Perhaps, we should rather say, with men more than with women, as a general rule, for women were apt to distinguish a flavour of self-esteem and self-seeking in Mr. Creighton's character, too subtle to be discovered by the less analytic male.

He was a little below rather than above the usual height, with a smooth, cropped, brown head, a keen, handsome face, without moustache or beard, but with an indication of the professional-looking half-inch of whiskers, which he afterwards cultivated assiduously; remarkably well-kept hands, and scrupulously neat and careful dress. His eye was cool and grey, his mouth somewhat thin, but his smile pleasant; and he had the advantage of a very sweet and well-trained voice. As he looked at Alys, it was easy to see that the gentler side of him was touched at the sight of her.

She was a pleasant sight, as she stood in her white dress with her back to a great velvet curtain which was drawn over the window at that end of the room. She looked al-

most like a very delicately-tinted statue, thrown into strong relief by the background of rich drapery against which she stood. She was of middle height—for a woman: nearly as tall in reality as Edmund Creighton; and graceful of outline. She had very little colour, and her hair was of the rare pale golden that looks like living sunbeams. Her eyes were also of an unusual tint: the deep blue-grey which is sometimes called violet, with lashes much darker than her hair. The fine sensitive features had a very sweet expression, and a look of perfect finish and completeness pervaded her whole being, from the topmost wave of her golden hair to the tip of her slender shoe. It was only when she moved that her one physical defect became apparent. Alys Lorimer was slightly lame.

It was a very slight lameness—not congenital, but the result of an accident in babyhood. Her nurse had let her fall out of her arms, and had not confessed the fact until the child's failing health proved that something had gone amiss. The mischief was palliated, but not cured; Alys remained very slightly lame, and would remain so until her dying day. It had never seemed a trouble to her until lately. Her very incapacity had all her life been made an excuse for showering caresses upon her. She had been petted, indulged, flattered, all her life. Only of late—as she came to womanhood—did it seem to dawn on her that there could be any real drawback in being a little lame.

"I was hoping that I should find you here," said Mr. Creighton.

"Does papa want me?" she asked, looking up.

"Mr. Lorimer did not ask for you. On the contrary, I believe he said that you would be so kind as to give me a cup of tea."

"Oh, certainly. I had told them to bring tea here, where we can see the flowers. It is quite warm now that the big furnace is lighted, is it not?"

"Mr. Lorimer knows how to make a house very comfortable," said Edmund Creighton, glancing around him with a wistful expression. It seemed a pity at that moment that

he knew—what he had just heard from Mr. Lorimer's own lips.

Alys moved a step or two towards a lounging-chair and sat down, her slender hands crossed before her in her lap. There was a yellow ribbon round her slim waist, and some loose silver bangles slipped over her wrists. She looked so delicate, so lovely, so unlike other women, Edmund thought, that a strange new flood of love and pity took possession of him and laid its weight upon his tongue. He could but look and long: he could not speak.

Such silence was unusual in Edmund Creighton, and Alys was vaguely surprised by it; but she did not know how he had been shocked and amazed that night.

Tea came in presently, and with the tea came Mr. Lorimer's favourite Angora cat, with topaz eyes, and Alys's snow-white Eskimo dog. Mr. Lorimer's fastidiousness was visible even in his choice of pets; they had all to be well bred and beautiful before they were allowed in his house. He knew of but one principle in life—to make things pleasant to ear and eye, body and mind; and that, in his opinion, was the whole duty of man.

"Do you think papa better, Mr. Creighton?" Alys asked earnestly, as she poured out the tea.

"A good deal better. Perhaps—a little trifle nervous about himself, don't you think?" Edmund insinuated, as he took his cup from her hand.

Alys looked indignant. "Oh, Mr. Creighton! But you don't understand. You see papa is so *very* sensitive."

"I suppose so," said Edmund, meekly.

"And he feels pain so much more than other people do. His organisation is so delicate. He is a great sufferer."

She sat beside the tea-table, looking at him with a glance of such honest reproach and surprise in her great blue eyes that Edmund Creighton felt extremely uncomfortable. He was out of charity with James Lorimer just then. James Lorimer had told him a fact which was causing him to think of that gentleman as "a selfish brute."

"Quite so. I am very sorry. I did not mean that he

was not a sufferer," said young Mr. Creighton, abjectly. "I hope you don't think I would speak disrespectfully of—of any one whom you care for, Miss Lorimer."

"Oh, no, of course not," said Alys, smoothing her ruffled plumes. "I am *sure* you would not. Oh, don't give Fluffy cake, please: it offends him so! Give him muffins."

"Pampered animal!"

"All our pets are pampered a little, I fancy," said Alys, with a sweet girlish laugh. "But it's papa's fault, not mine. He cannot bear to see anybody or anything about him uncomfortable."

"*Anybody—about him!*" Edmund repeated to himself, somewhat bitterly. "Yes—so long as the person was in his sight. But 'out of sight, out of mind,' is a proverb very particularly true with Mr. James Lorimer, I think."

But it would not have been safe to show a glimmer of this feeling to James Lorimer's daughter. He went on stroking the cat, and he said in an amiable manner—"Poor pussy," but his mind was in a tumult of anger and disappointment nevertheless.

Would he have been human had he felt otherwise? He loved and admired Alys, but he had not been unmindful of the fact that she was supposed to be an heiress. He had been brought up to consider the importance of a point of that kind; and he had always meant to take the northern farmer's somewhat crude advice, and even if he did not marry for money, to go where money was. Within the last hour he had found out his mistake. Alys would scarcely have a penny, roughly speaking, when her father died. And James Lorimer was ill of a mortal disease.

Alys found him unusually silent. She had known him for a good many years: they had only just left off calling each other by their Christian names (propriety in the shape of a maiden aunt had demanded this sacrifice), and she was in the habit of hearing news and gossip of all sorts from him. To break the silence, she asked after his sister. Edmund sat up, and his face broke into a smile.

"Marcia has got her way," he said. "She has gone to

Girton at last. I hope she will be happy there; but I am afraid she is not the girl to profit by that kind of life."

"What sort of girl," asked Alys, with interest, "would profit by it? Should I?"

"Not at all," said Edmund, promptly.

"You think me so frivolous," said Alys, with a touch of colour coming to her fair cheeks, and a slight pout to the rose-tinted lips.

"Not in the least; but—may I say what I think without offending you?"

"Of course you may. I do not know why we should be so stiff with one another," said Alys, innocently, "when we have been friends for years and years and years."

Edmund's eyes glowed. He wanted to press his lips to her slim white hand in gratitude for that simple, over-gracious speech; but he dared not do it yet. All that he dared do he did.

"Thank you—thank you: that is really a friendly speech," he said, warmly; "and may I say, 'Thank you, Alys,' just for once?"

She smiled; and he knew that, so far at least, he had not offended her. He plunged recklessly into speech.

"I am old-fashioned in some of my ideas about women. I like to think that those I care for are safe at home, not needing to work for themselves, lapped in comfort, sheltered and protected. I do not like them to have to push their way alone through a bustling, noisy world. I like them to have a nest of their own, and to stay in it. Such women as you, Alys, are not fitted to cope with the world outside. Neither, I think, is Marcia, who has always been a pet and plaything. You are home-birds, both of you."

"That is a very nice theory," said Alys, "for the girls who have homes, like Marcia and me; but—suppose we hadn't—suppose we were quite poor——"

"You must *never* be poor," said Edmund, with what seemed to her quite unnecessary violence.

"I hope I never shall be," said Alys, with a soft little laugh. "I should not like to be poor."

Edmund felt a burning sense of indignation with the man upstairs. If that man died while Alys was unmarried, the girl would be poor—very poor: there was no doubt of that. Of course there was the alternative that James Lorimer might live for years and years . . . and Alys might marry very soon. She was nineteen; and he could not fancy that a man would look at her and not love her. The little imperfection in her gait, even, had a charm for him. When she moved, he always wanted to gather her up in his arms and carry her over rough places.

The great Angora had jumped up to Alys's knee, and sat there purring softly, while Alys offered it cream out of a dainty saucer in her hand. Edmund stirred and looked at her undecidedly. Should he speak now? should he not speak? Did he love her well enough to risk and overbear the opposition that would probably be made by his family to his marriage with a penniless girl? The world at present thought her rich; but the secret would have to be disclosed when it came to a question of settlements.

"Marrying a lame girl without a penny!" that was how Edmund's family would express the facts.

He looked sideways at her, and thought how graceful, how charming she was. The murmur of the fountain seemed to make it more difficult to speak. The attention that she gave to the Angora was making it more difficult still. He did not realise that the true difficulty lay in his own will—that he had not yet perhaps quite made up his mind.

But he hated hesitation. He put out his hand a little way and touched hers: she took the touch for an attempt to caress the purring beast upon her knee. Once he murmured "Alys!" but she didn't hear.

Suddenly a bell rang, and Alys jumped up with a rather frightened and guilty face. "It's papa's bell," she said, "and I have forgotten to take him his tea. I am so sorry, Edmund, but I must go. Good-bye. You'll come some other day, will you not?"

Edmund was obliged, somewhat unwillingly, to accept

his dismissal; but he was a little consoled by hearing her call him—inadvertently, even—by his Christian name. At the same time he was haunted all the evening afterwards by a couplet which *he* thought singularly inappropriate—

> He that will not when he may,
> When he will, he shall have nay.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEAD PAST.

Alys flew up to her father's room. Something in the sharpness of his ring told her that he was annoyed: he was not a man who liked to be neglected, and she was distinctly conscious of having neglected him. It was with some timidity that she knocked and entered at his door.

As might have been expected, Mr. Lorimer's room was the best room in the house. He did not profess to entertain, and, until lately, there had been no lady of the house to be consulted; so that he was free to appropriate to his own use the big front drawing-room, with its three long windows looking out upon the square, and the adjoining apartment as a dressing-room. A much smaller room on the ground floor served Alys as a place in which to receive her visitors; Mr. Lorimer's friends were content with the dining and smoking-rooms.

Alys was well accustomed to the kind of luxuries with which her father liked to surround himself; but with some of his tastes she herself did not sympathise. His love of strong, sweet odours was an offence to her. When she came into his room she almost recoiled—so overpowering were the mingled perfumes which met her nostrils. Oriental incense, sandal-wood, a scented cigarette, bouquets of hothouse flowers, some growing hyacinths in pots—all these contributed their odours with a curiously stifling effect.

The girl did not know, what many of her father's friends

suspected, that these perfumes were designed to cover the odour of drugs—and especially of one or two narcotics of Eastern origin, with a peculiarly penetrating odour, to the use of which James Lorimer was given. He had begun to take these in order to alleviate pain: he continued the use of them as a habit because he liked it. But Alys knew nothing of all this.

"Where have you been?" said her father, with unusual sharpness. "You generally come to me at four; I have had to *wait*."

He laid an emphasis of injured majesty upon the last word of his speech.

"I am very sorry, papa," said Alys, meekly. "Mr. Creighton stayed a little while, and I was giving him tea."

"Young Edmund Creighton, you mean—not Mr. Creighton," said her father, testily. "Do give people their proper names. Well, I don't object to your being civil to young Creighton: he is useful, and he hasn't bad manners."

"I think he is very kind and nice," said Alys, flushing a little.

Her father looked at her in silence for a moment, as if struck by her tone.

"You like him, do you? Ah!"

Alys did not know in the least what he meant, and did not trouble to inquire. Mr. Lorimer seldom made a secret of what was passing through his mind, and his daughter did not always like what he revealed to her. Not that there was anything actively bad or harmful in the things he said; but they were sometimes more cynical or more ill-natured than she cared to hear.

"It would not be a bad thing," the father went on, with a slight smile flickering over his pale face. "You might do worse, child. I am half sorry I told him what I did: I may have spoiled your market—which is the last thing I wished to do."

"Papa, I don't know what you mean," said Alys, with glowing cheeks.

He laughed. "Don't you, my dear? Think over it, and

you will see the sense of what I say. And now you can read to me: there is a new book of Pater's just come from the library which we shall both enjoy."

Alys did not enjoy her reading so much as Mr. Lorimer had expected. She had been trained to take an interest in the books—chiefly on art and literature—that her father liked; but his words about Edmund Creighton disturbed her attention. Did he mean—was it possible—that Edmund had shown any special feeling about her? Now she thought of it, she remembered certain words and looks which had been inexplicable to her at the time; they had meant, perhaps, more than she knew. But why, then—the thought would recur again and again—why, then, had he not said a little more? Why had he not made it a little plainer—even that very afternoon?

She read on, more monotonously than usual, while her father listened and watched her, and thought his own cynical thoughts.

He was not yet fifty, and he was a very distinguished-looking man. Years of delicate health, and perhaps of unwholesome modes of life, had sharpened his features and whitened his skin, giving to his face the opaque tints of old ivory, against which the colour of his dark hair and fine eyes seemed almost unnaturally pronounced. He wore a dressing-gown, for he was only just recovering from one of his "attacks"—mysterious attacks of illness for which Alys knew no name—nevertheless, he managed to preserve an air of fastidious neatness and refinement which a man does not always put on with a *peignoir*. His left hand, long, white, and fine, was adorned with a heavy and valuable signet-ring.

"Put down the book, Alys," he said at last, in a somewhat harsh and grating voice. "I want to speak to you."

Alys laid the volume on the table beside her, and glanced up in surprise. She was used to her father's caprices; but conversation with herself was not one of them. He was fond of her; but he treated her like a little girl.

"How old are you?" he proceeded.

"Nineteen, papa."

"Quite a woman," said Mr. Lorimer, with his flickering smile, "and ready, no doubt, to think yourself wiser than your elders——"

"Oh, no, papa!" ejaculated the girl.

"You need not interrupt me: I know what girls are like. I have been thinking for some time that I would talk to you a little about your future, Alys—and perhaps about my past——"

He paused a little doubtfully. Alys raised her head with an eager look.

"Papa, I have so often wanted to ask you about my mother. I can just remember her."

"Then," said Mr. Lorimer, with a shadow suddenly falling across his face, "you remember a very beautiful woman."

"Yes, I know she was beautiful. I wish I had some likeness—some portrait—of her, papa. I have sometimes thought that perhaps you had one yourself——"

"I used to sketch in the days when she was living," said her father, in a dreamy tone. "Yes, I used to paint then—at first. Afterwards I gave it up—or Art gave me up—I don't quite know which. I have not painted anything for fifteen years."

"I suppose you did not care to paint after mamma's death," said Alys, drawing a little nearer to him. She was glad to think that he had loved her mother so well.

James Lorimer uttered a low, sardonic laugh. "I'm afraid that's not quite the right explanation," he answered. "I left off painting as soon as I could afford to do without it—as soon, in fact, as your mother's money was at my disposal."

Alys shrank back. His words sounded heartless: she did not know what to say.

"You are aware, I suppose," said her father, leaning back in the corner of his luxurious chair, and watching her troubled face, "that all the money I possess—the money that furnished this house, that enables us to live in comparative

comfort—that provides us with our bread and butter—came to me from your mother?"

"I knew nothing about it."

"It did. Your mother was something of an heiress—in a small way: oh, only in a small way, my dear. All that I had when I married her was a hundred and fifty a year, which has generally been devoted to your maintenance and education. The rest was left to me—unconditionally—by my wife. I was to do what I pleased with it—especially in regard to my impaired health. You understand, Alys?"

"Oh, yes, papa. But"—she lifted a lovely, puzzled face to his—"there is no reason why you should tell me all this. I do not need to know."

"That is true," said Mr. Lorimer, rather unexpectedly acquiescing. "There *is* no particular reason why you should know—just yet. Of course, you will have to hear about my affairs, when"—he shrugged his shoulders—"when I come to die."

"Please, please, papa, do not talk in that way. There will be many, many years before we need think or speak——"

"Will there? How are we to know that? Pooh! You are a baby, Alys, in spite of your nineteen years. Be sensible, and look the matter in the face."

"I would rather not, papa, dear."

Mr. Lorimer laughed. This affectionate dislike to the thought of his death pleased him: he read in it the devotion which the mother of Alys had borne to him, which Alys herself would always bear. He was used to the devotion of women; he thought it a beautiful and touching thing.

"We need not dwell on the painful part of the topic," he said, lightly. "But, you know, my dear Alys, that I am invalid—that life is uncertain—that it is always well to look forward a little and forecast difficulties. If anything happened to me—curious phrase, is it not?—you would be in a singularly lonely position, because of your dearth of rela-

tives—female relatives especially. I should be extremely pleased, Alys, if I thought I should see you settled in life—married, I mean, of course—before I had to go."

There was so much more gravity than usual in his tones that Alys was impressed, and did not smile at the desire so plainly and simply made known to her. She felt that her father was in earnest, was really and truly anxious for her future, and she did not this time try to silence him. She put her hand on the arm of her father's chair, and was gratified when he patted it.

"I will not mention any names," said Mr. Lorimer. "That might be premature. All that I want you to do is to remember that I should be glad to see you well married, Alys; and if an opportunity of any such marriage should occur—well, you had better think of it."

Alys murmured an assent, and drew a sigh meanwhile. She had her girlish dreams of a lover that should come some day; and she thought that her father's way of regarding marriage as a provision for the future was very prosaic. She was relieved when he changed the subject.

"I think I wanted to speak about the past rather than the future," he said, with an odd little grimace. "You asked if I had a picture of your mother. I can show you a sketch of her if you give me the old black portfolio that stands in the corner over there."

Alys fetched the portfolio—an exceedingly old and shabby one, she noticed—and placed it on a small table before him. He opened it in a musing, lingering way, and began to turn over the sketches which it contained, one by one.

"I did not often do figures," he said at last, in a low tone, "but I could not resist this attempt at your mother's face. It is a mere sketch, but I think it was like her at the time."

Alys took the sheet of paper he held out to her, and looked at it in reverent silence. It was, as he had said, a mere water-colour sketch, representing a young and beautiful woman, with a sweet fair face and golden hair, very like

her daughter's. Mr. Lorimer looked from the picture to the living girl, and smiled almost wistfully.

"I did not know you were so like her——" was what he said.

Then he went on turning over the other sketches, with a rather unsteady hand.

Suddenly he stopped, hesitated, then pushed another picture towards his daughter.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Oh, what a lovely creature!" Alys cried.

It represented a girl of eighteen, with a peach-like bloom, great liquid dark eyes full of fire and pathos, waving dusky hair, and features of exquisite refinement and delicacy. "Is it a portrait?" she said.

"It is a portrait. I wanted you to see it. That was my first wife, Alys. I was married before I met your mother. You have never known that fact before."

He spoke in a studiously matter-of-fact tone, and avoided her startled gaze. The girl gave a sort of gasp before she spoke again.

"Oh, papa!" she cried.

"There is nothing to be so very much surprised at, is there?" he said, drily. "Many men have been married twice. Now, Alys, have the goodness not to cry, for I wish to give you another piece of information, and you had better reserve your tears for that."

"What is it, papa?" said Alys, faintly. The tears had come from a sudden sense of his want of confidence in her, but she winked them hurriedly away. Mr. Lorimer looked at her with something very like malicious pleasure in her distress.

"How would you like an elder sister, my dear? Yes, there was a child—a girl; the mother died when she was born." A twitch passed over his pale, impassive face. "The mother died—the child lived: my Lisa's life was sacrificed for that baby's sake. You can't wonder if I never cared to see much of the child again."

"Do you mean to say," said Alys, turning pale with ex-

citement, "that the little girl lived—is living still? Where is she? Oh, papa, and you have never let me know her all these years."

"It would have been no pleasure to you to know her," said Mr. Lorimer, sharply. "When I last saw her, I was utterly horrified. Coarse, common, provincial to the last degree. Not a sister to be proud of, my dear child."

"But whose fault is it that she is common and coarse?" said Alys, turning her clear eyes upon him. "Where has she been brought up?"

"In the country—with her mother's relatives. I have not seen her since she was nine years old."

"And now—she is——"

"About three-and-twenty. You need not concern yourself, my dear. She has been brought up as her mother was brought up, and is, no doubt, perfectly happy."

"But you mean now to have her here?—you mean to be kind and good to her now at least, papa?" There was an unconscious reproach in the girl's eager voice.

Mr. Lorimer smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know that there is anything I can do for her," he said. "I have not told you with any idea of bringing her out of her sphere, or altering matters in any way, Alys. I simply thought it might be well for you to know the facts."

"I wish I had known them years ago," said Alys, in a low, shaken voice.

"Women are queer creatures," said Mr. Lorimer, whimsically. "I expected you to fly into a rage, and to cry your eyes out with jealousy."

"Papa, you don't mean it, surely! Think what a pleasure it would have been to me to have a sister all this time! You will let me know her now? What is her name?"

"Elizabeth."

"And I may write to her? You will give me her address?"

Mr. Lorimer mused. "To-morrow, perhaps," he said. "Put the portfolio away, Alys. Do you know—for the first

time—you make me think that my plan—the plan of all these years—has been a little bit of a mistake?"

"You will undo the mistake? You will give me a sister?" Alys pleaded, laying her hand softly on his arm.

"To-morrow, child, to-morrow."

But that morrow never came.

CHAPTER V.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

"If you please, sir, would you go round to Croyland Square as soon as possible? There is a messenger from Miss Lorimer, and something seems to have happened—Mr. Lorimer's either died sudden or took very ill, I can't tell which."

The speaker was an old and privileged servant of the Creighton family: once a nurse, and now a sort of housekeeper. She did not usually intrude upon the family at meal time; but breakfast was practically over, although Mr. Creighton still sat over his newspaper, and his wife and children had not left the room. The man who waited at table was new to his place, and had hesitated to bring the message; so Mrs. Moss, who knew all about the Lorimers, took it upon herself to trot in and deliver it.

Mr. Creighton, a tall spare man, with a shrewd face, keen eyes, dark hair and whiskers, and a peculiarly alert manner, threw down his newspaper, and looked round.

"What's that, Moss? Come in; what does the messenger say?"

Mrs. Moss, a round little dumpling of a woman, with a rosy face and grey curls, advanced a couple of paces into the room.

"The girl's crying, so that I couldn't get much out of her," she said, confidentially. "Perhaps if you would see

her yourself, sir, you'd make her speak up. But I'm afraid the poor gentleman's gone."

Edmund Creighton and his father looked at one another. The younger man had turned rather pale, and his lips were tightly compressed. Mr. Creighton the elder lifted his eyebrows, and also seemed disturbed.

"I hope not—I hope not, I'm sure," he said, with some warmth of manner. "Let me see the girl."

He went out into the hall and interviewed the weeping maid-servant; then returned to the dining-room to gulp down his last half cup of coffee, and give information to his family.

"It's quite true," he said. "Mr. Lorimer was found dead in his bed this morning, when the servant went in with his chocolate. Heart disease, I suppose."

"Or an overdose of chloral," thought Edmund to himself. But he did not put his suspicion into words.

"That poor girl of his!" exclaimed Mrs. Creighton, a large, fashionably-dressed lady, with a pleasant voice and superficially good-humoured smile. "What *will* she do? You had better find out, John, whether we can do anything for her."

"There will be plenty of things you can do for her, no doubt," said Mr. Creighton, a little drily. "I will tell her you will look in during the day—or one of the girls."

"Had we not better fetch her here?" said Lydia, who was the eldest daughter, a keen-faced girl, more like her brother than any other member of the family. She looked at Edmund as she spoke.

"It would be a very good thing, I think," said Edmund, speaking for the first time, with his eyes on the table-cloth. His father glanced at him, nodded, and went out.

To Lydia it seemed as if there were symptoms of some secret understanding between father and son. "Did you expect this?" she asked her brother, suddenly.

"Expect Mr. Lorimer's death? Certainly not."

"He was very wealthy, was he not?" remarked Mrs.

Creighton, meditatively. "I suppose the girl will have everything."

Edmund moved restlessly in his chair. "Like all the rest of the world, we shall know in time," he said.

"He lived in very good style," persisted Mrs. Creighton, "although he was too much of an invalid to entertain. He must have had a good income."

"Yes, I believe he had a good income," said Edmund, in a perfectly non-committal tone. He got up from the table then, and went away.

"Mamma," said Lydia, quietly, "there is something wrong about the Lorimers and their money."

"What do you mean, child? Who said so?"

"No one has said so; but I can see it by the way Edmund and papa behave. It would not surprise me at all to find that Alys Lorimer has nothing—absolutely nothing."

"Nonsense, Lydia! A fortune cannot dissolve into thin air. Edmund said Mr. Lorimer had a good income: where will that income go if not to his only daughter?"

"Perhaps it was a pension or something," said Lydia, vaguely.

"Don't be so absurd," said Mrs. Creighton, in rather a sharper tone than would have been expected from a woman who looked so good-tempered; "how could any pension in the world keep up that house in the way Mr. Lorimer kept it up? He must have spent a fortune on plants and flowers alone. Perhaps he has left large sums to charities, and Alys will not get it at all. I shall be sorry for that, for it would be greatly to Edmund's advantage if he married a rich wife."

"That is always the way people talk," said a new voice from behind a window-curtain, where the youngest of the family had ensconced herself during the conversation, without hitherto proffering a word. She put out a curly, dark head now, and showed a round, piquante, mocking little face. "As if riches were everything! As if it were the highest ideal in the world to be wealthy! As if Edmund would be committing a crime if he married a girl who was poor."

"You talk nonsense, Julian, and impertinent nonsense

too," said Mrs. Creighton, severely. "Why are you here at all? It is time for you to go to the schoolroom."

Juliana—more usually known as Julian—came out of her nook behind the window-curtain, and shook her curly mane of dark chestnut-coloured hair. She had hazel eyes, which could glow like flame when she was angry or excited; pretty features, rather too pale; and a trim little figure which looked childish in its short serge frock and school apron.

"Miss Smith isn't coming to-day: I have a holiday," she said. "Can I go and tell Moss that Alys Lorimer is coming, and help her to get the room ready?"

"We do not know that Miss Lorimer is coming yet," said Mrs. Creighton, who was displeased.

"Oh, mamma! As long as you thought her rich, you were ready enough for her to come! Now, when it is suggested she may be poor——"

"That has nothing whatever to do with it. Really, Julian, you are insufferable. Go away and practise, or employ yourself in some suitable way, and do not listen to the conversation of your elders. It is evident that little girls cannot understand it."

Julian retreated, controlling her unruly tongue with difficulty. She was something of an *enfant terrible*, this curly-haired girl of sixteen; for she was possessed with a hatred of conventionalities which she did not know how to suppress; and, good-natured on the whole as Mrs. Creighton was, she was tied and bound by the laws and customs which Julian abhorred, so that mother and daughter were apt sometimes to come into collision.

The Creightons were not a very united family. Mrs. Creighton and Lydia held together a good deal, went out, paid calls, sat and sewed in each other's society. Mr. Creighton was too busy to see much of his wife and daughters; but he had some intercourse with his son. The second girl, Marcia, had broken loose from the home moorings and gone to Girton; but this was rather a fashionable thing to do, and her mother did not mind it. Juliana was the trial

of the family. She was always in the way. She was brusque and impertinent: she was not a beauty, although fairly good-looking; she was not even to be called intellectual, although clever in her way. She was always, as she expressed it, odd man out. She got on with Edmund better than with any one else, for he was inclined to make a pet of her; but even with him she had occasional disputes, and he would sometimes remark that he thought she ought to be sent to school.

Her speech on behalf of poverty had so much ruffled Mrs. Creighton that at first she resolved not to ask Alys Lorimer to her house at all; but the conventional good-nature of the woman won the day over her annoyance, and she gave orders to Mrs. Moss to prepare a room. "Though it will be very awkward," she said privately to Lydia, "if anything *has* gone wrong about the money, for, of course, we cannot have our spare rooms taken up for ever by a penniless girl."

Meanwhile, Mr. Creighton had proceeded to the house in Croyland Square, lately inhabited by Mr. Lorimer. The story that he had heard was quite true. After his conversation with Alys on the previous evening, Mr. Lorimer had dined in his room and retired to his bed at an early hour. The valet said that his master had seemed tired and depressed, but not ill. Nothing more had been seen or heard of him until morning, when he was found lying quietly, as if asleep upon his pillows, but cold in the sleep of death. He must have been dead some hours when he was found.

The doctor had been and gone. He had told Alys gently and kindly, what most of her friends already knew, that Mr. Lorimer had for years suffered from an incurable form of heart disease, and that a sudden death of this kind was not wholly unexpected. "There will have to be an inquest, but merely a formal one," he said. "There is no doubt about the cause of death."

Mr. Creighton had been Mr. Lorimer's man of business, as well as an old friend; and it was natural, therefore, that Alys should send for him. He was very kind to her, very

soothing in manner—perhaps a little too pitying in tone; but Alys was used to him, and did not mind being pitied. She was utterly overpowered by the shock of her father's death, and yet she did not wish to accept Mr. Creighton's invitation to stay at his house.

"I should not like to go away: I should feel as if I were deserting *him*," she said.

"But, my dear young lady, you would not think of staying here, with nobody but the servants in the house. It would be most unbecoming—most improper."

"Could not Julian come and stay with me?" said Alys, and cried a little when she was told that Julian was much too young to be allowed to stay with her in the house of the dead. But she would not yield.

"I do not see why I should go away," she said. "There are a great many things to look after. Poor papa would not have liked me to leave everything to the servants. There are his birds—and the animals, you know, Mr. Creighton. I could not bear them to be neglected now."

"They would not be neglected. They are too valuable for that. We shall have no difficulty in finding homes for them," said the solicitor, incautiously. He was sorry he had said it next moment, for a cry of indignation broke from the girl's quivering lips.

"We shall not want to find homes for them. They will stay here with me, of course. Do you think I shall want to part with any of them?" said Alys, turning her amazed, indignant eyes upon him. "I shall keep them always—all their lives—if only for his sake."

"Yes, yes, of course—as long as it is convenient, of course," murmured Mr. Creighton, hardly knowing what he said. He could not enter upon business matters on the very day of her father's death. He took his leave as kindly as possible, but he was glad to get away; and for some reason or other, Alys was glad to get rid of him.

Later in the day Mrs. Creighton and Lydia swooped down upon her, and did their best to convince her that she had better spend the next few days with them. But Alys would

not be persuaded, and Mrs. Creighton bore a slight grudge against her in consequence.

"She seems to have been very devoted to her father," said that lady, in a tone of pique to her husband.

"Well, I dare say. He was a pleasant sort of man, and he certainly surrounded her with every luxury, poor girl."

"Why do you say 'poor'?"

"She is not so well off as she thinks she is. I cannot say more at present, Louisa. But you might give her a hint not to be too extravagant—about her mourning and all those things."

"I don't see how I can say anything if you tell me no more."

"I must speak to her before I speak to any one else," said Mr. Creighton, stolidly, "and I shall not speak until after the funeral."

His refusal to give exact information offended Mrs. Creighton a little, and she declined, therefore, to offer Alys a hint of any kind about her expenditure. Fortunately, the girl was not naturally extravagant, and her orders were all moderate, as Mr. Creighton found when he came to look over the bills.

The funeral was a simple one, according to James Lorimer's own instructions found in his desk. And when it was over, Mr. Creighton came back to the house in Croyland Square, and asked to be allowed the pleasure of a little conversation with her.

He was glad to see that, although pale, she was very composed. Her father's death had been a great shock to her, but it was not what the death of a more deeply loving parent might have been. She was quite able to hear what he had to say. "And I have something to say too," she told him, as they seated themselves in the dining-room.

"My business had, perhaps, better come first," said Mr. Creighton, pleasantly. "It is possible, of course, that you may know what I am going to say. Did your father ever speak to you about his pecuniary affairs?"

"Never."

"I am sorry for that. You will be unprepared, I fear, for the nature of my communication. You have thought, I dare say, my dear Miss Lorimer, that your father was a wealthy man, and that you would inherit his wealth?"

"Ye-es," said Alys, hesitatingly; "but from something he said to me on the night before—before he died, I can guess that there is a—a sort of complication."

"Complication! No; there is nothing of that kind," said Mr. Creighton, staring at her. "It is all very simple, unfortunately."

"I meant," said Alys, quietly, "that there is another daughter, you know. Papa's elder daughter by his first marriage—Elizabeth Lorimer. Will not everything have to be divided with her?"

"Good heaven!" cried the solicitor. "Do you mean to say, Miss Lorimer, that there is a—a—another daughter whom nobody has ever heard of? He never mentioned a second marriage to me." Mr. Creighton positively gasped with dismay.

"It was the first marriage," said Alys, trying to speak clearly. "He was married, and his wife died before he met my mother. His daughter is about twenty-three years old by this time."

"And where is she? Where does she live?"

Alys looked blank. "I do not know. I have been expecting her to appear all this while. I took it for granted that she would hear of papa's—— I see now that it was very silly of me. I ought to have mentioned it before."

"You ought indeed," said Mr. Creighton. "We must look over your father's papers, and see what instructions he has left, my dear; or we may find letters. Dear me! it is a curious thing that I never knew. You—you have always known, I suppose?"

"I knew nothing until the night—the night before my father died," said Alys, turning her head away.

Mr. Creighton made a sound of inarticulate reply, muttered something to himself, and shook his head.

"I had better come to my business with you before I go

into the other matter," he said, after a little pause. And then he launched into details which were at first somewhat confusing to Alys, because she did not know whither they were tending. The sum and substance of Mr. Creighton's communication was this: James Lorimer had chosen to sink all the capital of his wife's fortune in an annuity for his own life. It was the supremely selfish act of a selfish man. He secured for himself a remarkably good income, out of which he saved nothing, denying himself no indulgence of his luxurious tastes. Probably he cheated himself into believing that Alys would marry before his death, and that his elder daughter would be looked after by the Verralls, his first wife's relatives. He did not trouble himself about any adequate provision for either of them. His own little income of one hundred and fifty per annum remained untouched, and would descend to his daughters; the furniture of the house, the pictures, bric-à-brac, expensive toys and pets would have to be sold in order to cover outstanding bills. Instead of being an heiress, Alys Lorimer would have a mere pittance of an income and be without a home.

"I shall have gained a sister," said the girl, "and perhaps that will make up for all."

Mr. Creighton thought it unlikely.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. CREIGHTON'S ADVERTISEMENT.

THE world might change, but changes did not come to Quest.

The lonely farmhouse, set in the gap between two blocks of mountain ranges, stood grey and solid in the sunshine, much as it had stood on the summer day when James Lorimer sobbed his heart out at the bedside of his wife Elizabeth. Only it was spring-time now, and the shrubs were but faint-

ly green, and there was no glory of summer flowers in the garden, but only a tangle of violet and ranunculus, primrose and budding wallflower, and daffodils nodding beneath the rough-cast wall.

The mistress of the house was busy, flitting hither and thither, ordering her men and maidens, and keeping a watchful eye over half-a-dozen matters at a time; for there was no cleverer housewife in all the country-side than Lisbeth Verrall, mistress of Quest. She was three-and-twenty, and had had the management of the farm for the last eighteen months. All the world had prophesied disaster when Farmer Verrall died, leaving all that he possessed to his granddaughter's management; but when it was found that everything went on much as it had done before, and that the farm appeared to flourish in Lisbeth's hands, the world saw fit to change its tune. "Best thing old Farmer Verrall could have done," they said, "considering how little his son Zadock was fit for. Lisbeth was a rare fine lass, and he would be very lucky as got her. And a rich woman too, if every tale be true."

Yes: as Cumberland counted riches, Lisbeth was a woman of wealth. More than that, she was a woman of importance. She had a good head for business, a strong will, and—occasionally—a sharp tongue. She was liked, she was respected, and she was sometimes feared.

But she did not look like a person to be feared, as she paused for an instant at the farmhouse door, and looked for a moment at the wide expanse of valley below the house, lighted up by the fitful sunbeams of an April afternoon. She came to the side door for this passing glance of hers—the door that opened into the garden. It was characteristic of Lisbeth that she would use this door—would set it open, and go in and out of it, in spite of all remonstrances from her relations. *They* had never used that side door: the kitchen door had served them all their lives: why should Lisbeth "set herself up" to be better than they? Lisbeth made no answer to these plaints, chiefly uttered by old Mrs. Verrall, her grandfather's second wife; she simply went on

her own way, and paid no attention. Every now and then somebody was in the habit of grumbling at her for "fine-lady ways"—that is, for touches of refinement and fastidious tastes to which small farmers' wives and daughters in the neighbourhood were not accustomed; but Lisbeth held calmly on her way. This power of disregarding opinion stood her in good stead; but there were moments when it led her into difficulty and danger, and had the look not of a virtue but of a vice.

She was simply dressed in a gown befitting her daily work—a plain cotton, originally buff-coloured, now faded by repeated washings to a pale primrose. The dress was, however, half concealed by a large white apron with a bib. The mixture of white and yellow suited her dark beauty; and the plainness of her gown displayed the fine proportions of her stately figure to perfection. Lisbeth was a very handsome woman, who stepped like a queen; but she got little praise for beauty from the countrymen and countrywomen who surrounded her. They said she was "a fine strapping lass," and that was all. Possibly the unusual dignity of her demeanour, which came partly by nature and partly from her position, had something to do with the want of admiration she received. The yokels of the neighbourhood liked a girl to kiss and romp with, a girl who boxed their ears, a girl with whom they could "keep company." Nobody had ever talked of "keeping company" with Lisbeth Verrall. And yet there was some one for whom she watched beneath her hand, as she shaded her eyes from the sunlight, and looked down the winding road.

One man's eyes, perhaps, had seen the beauty of her liquid dark eyes, of her dusky hair, springing from her low broad forehead, in thick lovely waves; of her warm complexion, cream-colour melting into peach-like bloom on the oval cheek; of the grave beautiful mouth, and the delicious curves of the throat and chin; but this man, who had eyes to see, was no country yokel, and bore in his county an honoured name. Was this man a mate for Lisbeth Verrall, the mistress of Quest?

She stood looking, with a faint smile lurking at the corners of her mouth. She had seen something—some one—in the distance, and the sight seemed to please her. By and by the sound of a horse's hoofs could be heard on the high road. She instantly lowered her shading hand and stepped down into the garden, as if she had lost interest in the person who approached. But as she bent over some young springing plants, and seemed for the moment absorbed in tending them, she was quite conscious of the fact that the sound was drawing nearer, that finally it stopped, and that the rider had dismounted at the farmhouse gate.

"Good afternoon, Lisbeth."

She turned at once and smiled, frankly enough. She did not blush—she was too strong and healthy often to change colour—but her eyes shone. She was glad to see her visitor, and, to judge by his face, he was glad to see her too.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Moor."

The young man's face fell. It was not naturally a very joyous face, but it had been bright with expectation before she spoke.

"Mr. Moor?" he repeated, in a reproachful tone. "Lisbeth, you promised to be kind."

"I don't see that I am unkind," said Lisbeth, still smiling. "I speak as becomes my station—that is all."

Her accent was not untouched by northern influences, but it was wonderfully refined considering the few opportunities she could have had of hearing speech differing from that of the Verralls. Francis Moor, the Squire of Moor End, never heard it without marvelling at its superiority to the accent of the people around her. But when she talked of her "station," he took offence.

"If you call me Mr. Moor," he said, "I must call you Miss Verrall."

"Well, indeed," said Lisbeth, "I sometimes think that would be best."

She was not very amiable towards him, he thought; and yet there was no harshness or anger on her open brow. She had walked slowly along the flagged path until she stood

close to the gate, outside which Mr. Francis Moor waited humbly. She now unlatched the gate and opened it. "Won't you come in, Mr. Moor?" she asked, demurely.

To say that Lisbeth coquetted would not be true; she was above every form of coquetry, and quite too clear of mind and firm of purpose to employ it; but sometimes, when she was in a very gracious mood, she would play at teasing Mr. Moor a little, just for the fun of the thing, and because he knew she did not mean it. They had been friends since they were children, and it was only lately, and intermittently, that she had taken sometimes to calling him "Mr. Moor."

"Say, 'Come in, Frank,' and I will come," said the young man.

"How foolish you are!" she answered, in an admonitory voice. "What will the girls think if they see me standing here holding the gate open for you? Well, come in, Frank, if you mean to come in at all."

"That's right: I have conquered."

"You think yourself very clever," said Lisbeth, with a touch of tender scorn. "I am not so easily conquered as all that."

"I know: you need not remind me. You are as obstinate as a mule," said Frank, with the freedom engendered of old acquaintanceship; "but I like you the better for it, you know, Lisbeth," he added, in a lower voice, as they walked up the garden path together.

"I suppose you have come about the red heifer?" she said, steadfastly ignoring the touch of sentiment that had crept into his musical young voice; "but Zadock's not at home just now. If you will come in and wait for him, I will make you a cup of tea."

"I will wait for the cup of tea with pleasure," said Frank; "but, as it happens, Lisbeth, I have not come to see Zadock or the red heifer, but yourself."

Lisbeth lowered her eyes for a moment, then raised them, clear and fearless, to his face.

"To see me?" she said. "It's rather the wrong time of

day to see me, especially if we are to go into that matter of the eggs we sent to your housekeeper. I shall have to get out the books, and——"

"Nonsense, Lisbeth. As if I were going into housekeeper's squabbles. Tell Mrs. Crowe to go to Jericho, and be hanged to her. We could make her sing very small, couldn't we, dear, if we chose?"

For once Lisbeth flushed—rather angrily.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Moor."

"Ah, yes, Lisbeth, you do, although you always pretend to have forgotten now-a-days. You remember the evening up by the barn—where the sunset was so beautiful—and you promised never to forget me. What else did you promise, Lisbeth? I have not forgotten."

Lisbeth had grown paler than usual, and answered with a certain kind of constraint:

"We were only boy and girl then," she said, "and did not know what we were talking about. I think it is a pity to bring up things that are dead and gone."

"But are they dead and gone, Lisbeth?" he asked, putting his hand upon her wrist. She drew it away and hid it underneath her apron. "No, you shall not give me your answer now. I am not asking for an answer, you most cautious and cold of women. I only want you to know that I remember . . . and do not intend you to forget. No, I did not come for that. I came for something quite different—for a good, solid, business-like reason, which I have in my pocket-book."

"What is it?" she said, recovering her usual manner as soon as he quitted that very delicate subject of their relationship to one another in the future. "What can it be?"

Frank had produced his pocket-book, and now took from it a cutting from a newspaper. "Does not that advertisement apply to you?" he said.

Lisbeth took it and read—

"If Elizabeth Lorimer, daughter of the late James Lorimer and Lisa Lorimer, his wife, will apply to Messrs. Jerrold

& Creighton"—here followed a lengthy London address—"she will hear of something to her advantage."

Lisbeth's black brows contracted. "I have nothing to do with the name of Lorimer," she said. "I have been called Verrall as long as I can remember, and I'm too old to begin with anything else."

"You need not. You can still call yourself Verrall—or any other name; but—that advertisement does apply to you, does it not? I was puzzled at first by the name Lisa."

"Oh, that is easily explained," said Elizabeth Verrall, almost roughly. "*He* called her Lisa; Lizzy was not grand enough for him, granny used to tell me. Yes, I suppose the advertisement is for me."

"Evidently your father is dead," said the young man.

"So I suppose."

Lisbeth stood straight and square in the doorway: her brows still contracted, her lips compressed. The mention of this dead father made her angry. But there were things Frank Moor wanted to know, and he did not mind Lisbeth's anger very much.

"You have not known for some time whether he was alive or dead, have you?" he asked.

"We did not want to know."

"But when was he here last?"

"Fifteen years ago. Up to that time he had occasionally written a letter to my grandfather, and sent him money for my keep; after that he never wrote or sent anything again. I might have gone to the workhouse for all he cared. I think him a bad, selfish man," said Lisbeth, with flashing eyes, "and I am not sorry to hear that he is dead."

"Perhaps he died when you were a child," said Frank, reflectively, "and could not do anything for you."

"Then, why do people seek me out now?"

"His heirs—if he had any—have only just learnt of your existence, perhaps. Come, Lisbeth, you must not be hard and unjust. You must find out what this advertisement is about."

She was silent for a moment, and then said, determinedly, "I don't want to know."

"Your friends will want to know for you."

"Ay!" said Lisbeth, with a world of bitter meaning in her tone. "To know whether he has left me a fortune; after despising me and doing his worst for me all my lifetime! Do you think that makes amends? It isn't that I blame him for leaving me here with my grandfather: he couldn't have done better for me than that, and nobody honours my grandfather more than I do; but it is just that he took no notice, he did not care, he did not love me as a father should have done. I can't forgive him for that, Frank, and I never shall."

"But, perhaps, it was accidental? perhaps he did care for you in his heart?" said Frank, who had been in the habit for many years of trying to soften Lisbeth in a hundred hard or angry moods.

"I know better than that," said Lisbeth, abruptly. "He came here when I was eight years old, and I was called in from the fields to come and speak to him. They say he was fond of my mother—I do not know: I think if he had loved her he would not have looked at me and spoken to me as he did. 'Faugh!' he said, 'she reeks of clay. Stand where you are: don't come nearer me. Is she always as grimy as she is now, Mrs. Verrall?' These were his words: you may laugh at them if you please, but I shall never forget the tone —the look—the accent—Oh, he hated me, and I hated him: I shall never think of him with any love or pleasure; and it is no use trying to make me change my mind."

As she spoke she tore the paper across, and let the fragments float away upon the breeze.

"That's all very well," said Frank, discontentedly; "but, Lisbeth—think—it may not be for your own good only: there may be relations of his, even if he is not living, whom you might help——"

He knew that the thought of help rendered to another would stir her more than any hope of benefit for herself.

"Ah, well!" she said, with a sigh, "if there had been

anybody! But *he* is dead; and I know nothing of his relations. The advertisement speaks only of 'something to my advantage': why should I seek my advantage through him?"

She was not to be persuaded, and Francis Moor finally held his tongue. "I shall be going to London myself next week," he thought, "and I might seek out these precious lawyers—I suppose they are lawyers—for myself. I know the address. There can be no harm in ascertaining the truth, at any rate."

Aloud he only said, "You always have your own way, Lisbeth. You must have it in this case, I'm afraid. But I think you are wrong."

Lisbeth smiled. It was delightful to her to be told that she was "wrong" by Francis Moor.

CHAPTER VII.

BY THE QUARRY.

WHEN the month of May was well-nigh over, Francis Moor rode up again to the gate of Quest. There was a look of triumph on his brow.

Mr. Francis Moor was in a somewhat peculiar position. He was the owner of one of the most picturesque and celebrated old houses—half of it in ruins—in the county: he was the possessor of an estate which brought him in almost nothing a year; and he was even more unlucky in the possession of a talent which had not been sufficiently cultivated to be turned to use, and which unfitted him for other things. He had a passion for music, and played the violin with exquisite pathos; but he just wanted the power, the *technique*, which would have made his talent marketable. Besides, his mother would have broken her heart (she said) if he had become a professional musician; and he was very fond of his mother. He had been brought up to think a good deal

of himself—of his family, his ancestors, his grand old house: his name ranked higher than that of many nobles, simple though it was, and he had that curious touch of pride which makes a man associate freely with persons connected with the land—gamekeepers, shepherds, yeomen, for instance—while he hates and detests anything connected with the very name of trade. Thus to Francis Moor the Verralls were far more to his mind and of "his sort" than the retired grocers who had just built a brand new red-brick castle down in the valley, and were reputed to be millionaires. And his mother, Lady Adela, would have agreed with him.

But these ideas—confessedly behind the age—were the bane of his life. What was there that he could do without soiling his fingers? He could not go into "business"; he had not money enough for a profession. Even the army was closed to him because of his want of ready cash. He had not been sent to the University: he had idled about at home, vaguely waiting for the "appointment" which some noble relative had promised, and which never came. He read classics with a clergyman, looked after his poor little estate, played the fiddle, and made love to Elizabeth Verrall—or, to give her for once her right name, Elizabeth Lorimer.

It was not a healthful nor an elevating existence. To Frank Moor's credit be it spoken, he did not fall into any very bad habits: partly because of a certain innate refinement of mind, partly because of Lisbeth's influence. He had an idealistic nature: he liked to dream, to scribble verses, to read old books: and, as old Farmer Verrall used to observe, "there was no harm in him." Nevertheless, he was not a milksop: he was expert in athletics, a good runner and wrestler, and the best rider in the country side—a distinction which his mother prized far above any that he could have won in the musical profession.

Of course, Lady Adela knew that her son went very often to Quest. He was much too candid to conceal the fact; and he did not hide his admiration for Lisbeth. But his mother never seemed alarmed.

"You must have great confidence in your son," a friend once remarked to her, after a heated discussion of Frank's "little ways."

"I have, at any rate, great confidence in Miss Verrall," Lady Adela replied, with a smile; and the friend could say no more.

"Lisbeth, where are you?" said the young man, penetrating joyously into the dairy, where he had no business to be. "How cool and sweet it is here, after London! Lisbeth, I want you to come out and talk to me on most important business. Come, there's a dear."

Lisbeth looked at him reproachfully, for one of the maids was within hearing, and grinning from ear to ear; but Mr. Moor took no notice. "Come for a walk with me," he said, coaxingly, when he had almost dragged her into the garden. "It is a lovely morning, and I want to talk to you."

"You are very unreasonable, Mr. Moor. How can I leave my work? I am so busy now that I don't know how to get done, and I certainly cannot waste the morning in idle chatter."

"Lisbeth, don't be severe."

"Besides," said Lisbeth, straightening herself, "it is not right for the servants to see me gadding about with you of a morning. Patty was laughing in the rudest way. I will not have it. You might at least call me Miss Verrall when my servants are there to hear."

"Lisbeth, forgive me, dear; I am very sorry," said Frank, putting on an aspect of penitence. She looked at him sternly, really thinking in her own mind how much handsomer he was than other men. His finely-chiselled features, pale complexion, soft brown eyes, and small pointed beard were just what she had seen in the pictures that hung in the gallery at Moor End. Francis Moor was like the ancestors who had worn ruffs and doublets in Tudor times, or in later days the love-locks of the cavalier. She felt that he was not a modern man, and knew next to nothing of the realities of life.

Gradually her features relaxed a little—for how could she long be angry with him, when she loved him so well?—and she actually smiled.

"You ought to know better than to come in the morning," she said. "But I'll tell you what I'll do. If you wait for half-an-hour, I'll put on my hat and go up to the Quarry, and you can walk with me. I did not mean to go until afternoon; but I'll try to manage it in the morning. Now I must go back to the dairy. I'm making up the butter for market."

"Can't I come with you?"

"No."

"Where's Zadock, then? I haven't seen him for an age."

Lisbeth's dark eyes softened. He could see that he had pleased her by the inquiry. She was devotedly attached to Zadock Verrall—poor Zadock, whose mind was hopelessly clouded, whose great physical strength indeed remained, and could be utilised by others, but whose intellect was that of the child whom James Lorimer had felled to the ground in passionate anger at the taunt hurled at him by the baby lips. Lisbeth was friend, sister, mother almost, to Zadock, whose own mother, a querulous invalid, usually to be found in the great cushioned armchair in the chimney-corner of the kitchen at Quest, was neither help nor comfort to any one; and he rewarded her for her affection by the dumb dog-like devotion of a creature who is too simple for anything but love.

She directed Frank to the place where Zadock might be found, and the young man went off cheerily to seek him out. To people who were used to his infirmity, there was a good deal to like in Zadock. He was "simple," as the country-folk said; but he was harmless and kindly. Wild creatures loved him, and let him explore their haunts without fear. There was no better guide than Zadock to the uplying lands, the hillsides, and the fells; and no country lad of the neighbourhood but felt honoured when he was allowed to follow the brawny simpleton to some far-off resort of moorland birds and beasts. Nervous mothers grumbled now and then,

saying that the poor fool was a dangerous character, and led their boys into peril from which he could easily extricate himself, but had not the wit to help others. Also, it was noticed that he had occasional fits of unreasonable anger, during which his great strength made him somewhat to be feared, as he could not be easily restrained by force, nor made to understand remonstrance. But a word from Lisbeth quieted him; and in fact these passions of anger were rarely roused, and only when he fancied, in his poor fool's brain, that she was hurt, insulted, or injured in any way.

"Well, Zadock, how goes it?" said Frank, who found him in the byre with a pitchfork in his hand.

Zadock's face brightened. He gave an awkward nod and a queer short laugh, which showed that he was pleased. His figure was of herculean proportions, but spoiled by a slouching gait; his blue-grey eyes were clouded, and the sunburnt face, meant by Nature, alas! to be intelligent, was stolidly vacuous. He stood leaning on his pitchfork, and smiling: it was his form of sociability.

"Good growing weather, eh, Zadock?"

Zadock nodded.

"Got anything new to show me?"

The simpleton's face beamed with delight. He put his hand in his pocket, and drew out a long variegated snake, which twined itself round his arm in a most familiar manner. Frank laughed, and put out his hand to take it.

"Nay," said Zadock, in a thick guttural voice; "she'll bite thee. See here!"

He forced open the snake's slit of a mouth, and exhibited the fangs.

"She's a bad 'un," he said.

"But what is it?—an adder?" Frank asked.

"Eh, I doan't know. Striped lady, I call her. She's none from these parts."

"Strayed from a menagerie, I believe," muttered Frank. "Look here, Zadock, you must be careful of that brute. It might hurt you."

"She won't hurt Zadock; she knows me." And as if to

prove the truth of his remark, the young man unwound the creature and thrust it carelessly back into his pocket, the snake seeming quite heedless of the handling it received from its master.

Frank strolled about the farmyard for a little while, until he saw Lisbeth approaching him with a basket on her arm. She had changed her dress in honour of his companionship, and wore a close-fitting tweed and felt hat—a workmanlike, well-made dress, which might have been worn by the greatest lady in the land. A cock's feather in her hat gave the touch of smartness which Miss Verrall was sometimes inclined to despise.

"How nice you look, Lisbeth!" said Mr. Moor. He spoke out his thoughts to her as frankly as a boy. "I've seen nobody, even in London, who could compare with you; or, at least—not many."

He paused suddenly, as if confused by a darting memory; and Lisbeth laughed. She was in good spirits, and meant to enjoy her walk. For the purposes of enjoyment it was better that Frank should not be too sentimental.

"I'm glad you put in that last phrase," she said. "It sounds more truthful than the first one."

"Let me carry your basket."

"No, thank you; Zadock will do that. You know he is hurt if anybody else carries it for me," she added, in a lower tone, as Zadock shambled up. He took the basket, and fell behind them, like a servant—it was Zadock's way. Lisbeth and Francis Moor took no further notice of him; it was enough for him that he was in their company, and of use to his beloved Lisbeth.

"Why are you going to the Quarry?"

"One of the ploughman's children is ill. I promised to take her some beef tea and eggs."

"You are always so good, Lisbeth—especially to those who are in trouble."

Lisbeth divined some special meaning in this address. She looked at him quickly. "I know you are going to ask me to do something for somebody, Mr. Moor."

"I can't deny it, Lisbeth. But why on that account——"

"Frank, then," she said, not waiting for the end of his remonstrance. "But what is it? You look rather serious —is it something more important than usual?"

"Yes, you witch-woman, it is. Lisbeth, I am a little bit afraid of what you will say to me. I have done something which I am afraid you may not like."

"Tell me, Frank."

"You know that I have been to London? It seemed to me, Lisbeth, that you were making a mistake in not answering that advertisement. So I went myself to the address, saw the lawyer, and obtained the necessary particulars. There is no fortune for you to inherit, you may be glad to hear."

"I am very glad of it. But you had no business to go without my consent."

"I know I had not. But for once, Lisbeth, I did not think you were doing your duty. And I'm quite sure of it now."

He was speaking with more caution and reserve than usual, for he knew the strength of that resolution which was to be read so plainly upon Lisbeth's face.

"I am sure you ought to know," he went on, earnestly. "Did you ever hear that your father married again?"

"I am not surprised."

"His wife died, leaving him money. He had one daughter, whom he brought up in comfort and luxury. She is nineteen now; lame, and—rather delicate in health."

"She has no doubt plenty of friends," said Lisbeth, drily.

"Wait a moment. James Lorimer spent his wife's money in providing himself with an annuity, terminable with his life. He has left his daughter about seventy pounds a year, and a little ready money from the sale of his furniture. The girl has not been used to do anything for herself: she does not know how to manage things: she is quite alone in the world."

"You have seen her?"

"For five minutes or so. She did not know that I knew

you. She had heard of you only the night before her father died. She is staying—on sufferance, I gather—at the lawyer's house—a Mr. Creighton, whom I happened to know something of. I saw her there for a few minutes."

There was a silence. Then Lisbeth spoke. "You want me to do something, Frank," she said. "What is it? Speak out: there is no need for you to be timid with me."

"I am not timid," said Frank, a little hurt by her tone; "only—I wanted you to propose it yourself."

"Propose what?"

"I want you to be a friend to that poor child, Lisbeth—she is alone."

"And how can I be a friend to her? What can I do for her? She is used to grander people than poor farmer-folk. She would laugh at the idea of calling me her friend."

"I don't think so. She had a forlorn kind of look. I want you to write to her, Lisbeth, and ask her to come here."

"To come here!" There was a note of derision in Lisbeth's voice.

"Yes, to come here. You are her sister—her elder sister; and you should look after her."

All this time they had been breasting a steep hill; and now they stood on a ridge beside which the remains of a deep quarry could be seen. Two or three stone cottages were grouped together in the hollow.

"I am going in," said Lisbeth, abruptly. "Wait for me here."

Frank flung himself down upon the crisp short turf, and waited, keenly enjoying the fresh invigorating breezes of the heights, the fine view of the valley, the blue sky with its puffs of white cloud overhead. It was some time before Lisbeth returned. Her face was very serious as she stood beside him.

"Frank," she said, "I have been thinking it over. There is a little child dying inside that house. The mother is crying at its bedside. I thought when I saw them—of *her* mother—and of mine. . . . I can't make it quite clear even to myself; but I mean that if there is anything I can do—if

I can prevent some other woman's child from being as lonely as—as I—have sometimes been; then I'll do it, if I can."

Frank had half drawn himself up, but had halted upon one knee at Lisbeth's side. Now he drew her hand towards his lips and kissed it before she knew what he was thinking of.

"You are the noblest of women, Lisbeth," he said; "and if you had seen that sweet delicate girl, pining under her weight of sorrow and loneliness, you would want to help her as much as I did."

"Tell me what I shall do," said Lisbeth simply; but, in spite of her generous magnanimity, a strange new pang suddenly pierced her womanly heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNWELCOME GUEST.

Alys Lorimer had been nearly six months with the Creightons. They had all been kind to her—especially at first; and she was so bewildered with the shock of her grief and her new circumstances that she did not for some time realise that she might be an unwelcome guest. Some few words about the inconvenience of the loss of a spare room, overheard accidentally (as she believed) by her, opened her eyes. She had overstayed her welcome. Mrs. Creighton wanted her gone; Lydia was tired of her; she had been in Mrs. Creighton's way. She must go—but whither?

Other members of the family showed no signs of dislike or weariness. Edmund was always assiduously kind; Marcia, from Girton, was pleased to have a new hearer for her adventures; Julian devoted herself with ardour to Alys's entertainment. Still it was different from her old life: she missed the little luxuries to which she had been accustomed; she shrank into herself at tiny slights, which she had never

before encountered. For the first week or two she was treated as an honoured visitor; then, as Mrs. Creighton discovered how narrow her income was likely to be, she gradually dropped the little attentions which she had showered on her guest. The fire in the bedroom was discontinued; then the cup of tea before dressing; the delicate refection at eleven; the daily drive—all these things became non-existent; and Alys found herself by degrees reduced to a state of discomfort which she had not even experienced in her schooldays. Of course, she had no maid; and her lameness made her rather slow and unhandy in doing things for herself. But it was not kind of Mrs. Creighton to sneer at her for her helplessness; and tears of shame and anger rose very often to poor Alys's eyes when she realised the position in which she was placed.

Neither Mr. Creighton nor Edmund had any notion of this state of things. Men do not easily fathom the ways in which a woman's spite can vent itself. When the two men came home in the evening they found every one smiling and radiant; and if Alys, in her plain black dress, looked pale and spiritless, they put it down to grief for her bereavement, and thought no more about it. Edmund was usually keen-eyed; but his affection for his mother and sisters blinded him a little to their faults, and they took care to conceal from him any evidences of coldness or unkindness. They knew very well that Alys would not tell. It was reserved for Julian to open Edmund's eyes.

She lay in wait for him one afternoon when he came home about six o'clock, and drew him into a little book-room or library near the hall door. "Edmund," she began, "I want to speak to you about Alys. She is so miserable."

"Miserable?" said Edmund. "Why?"

He himself did not look very happy. He was very weary in his mind.

"Because mamma and Lydia are so unkind to her. They are, indeed. They do everything they can to make her uncomfortable, because they want that spare room; and they don't like having her here, now that she isn't rich. Oh,

Edmund, indeed it is true. I am not a silly, spiteful child; I have eyes, and I can see."

"But, surely, Julian—you don't know what you are saying! Mother would never be unkind to a friendless girl——"

"Oh, wouldn't she? You don't know her. You don't know how she used to behave to the governesses. Well, I'll give you a proof. Alys is to turn out of the spare room, because it is wanted for Arabella Brownson; and she is to have the little attic-room; and mamma suggested yesterday that she ought to make herself useful, and that she might mend the house-linen——"

"Julian!"

"It is quite true, Edmund. I'm glad you are indignant. Alys was as sweet as possible, and said she ought to have thought of it herself, and she has been working all day at these wretched sheets and tablecloths and things, until she is quite worn out; but she won't leave off, although she is as hot and nervous and overdone as she can be, because she says she wants to show that she is grateful. Grateful, Edmund! isn't it hateful of mamma to have put such ideas in her head?"

Edmund stood frowning and indignant. "Where is she?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"She is in the old schoolroom, sewing for dear life," said Julian, with a short little laugh. "Come and see her: make her put it away. She will kill herself if she goes on like this. Come upstairs: you needn't be afraid: mamma and Lydia are out."

Edmund followed silently. He was dismayed. And he was in this difficulty—that his father had all but forbidden him to make love to Alys Lorimer. "If you do, you'll deprive her of a home," Mr. Creighton had said. "I shall not keep her under my roof if there is going to be any nonsense of that kind."

So Edmund had held aloof, meaning, however, to take matters into his own hands when six months had elapsed. But Julian had forced his hand by her disclosures.

He wished vainly that he had made his decision and

spoken of his love to Alys on that day when they sat together and looked at the flowers in the conservatory. He had been held back then, partly because he was shocked by the facts concerning the annuity which Mr. Lorimer had that afternoon divulged to him: partly because he thought he did not know his own mind. He knew it now. He knew that he loved Alys truly and sincerely, and that he did not care a jot for her want of wealth. But could he make her understand why he had never spoken before?

The old schoolroom was a small apartment near the top of the house, little used now because it was dark and inconvenient. Here sat Alys Lorimer, and a glance at her showed Edmund that Julian's account had not been overdrawn. Alys was hot and tired and nervous: her cheek—much thinner than it used to be—burned with a hectic flush, and her eyes were heavy and swollen: her hands trembled, and her posture, as she bent over her sewing, showed fatigue and dejection. She blushed violently when Edmund entered, and turned a reproachful eye on Julian, but she could not speak.

Edmund simply went up to her and took the work out of her hands. "Take this away, Julian," he said, sweeping an armful of white stuff from the table. "Take it all down to the servants. Miss Lorimer is never to touch it again: do you hear? It is much too tiring for her."

Julian gathered up the work gleefully, and disappeared with a snowy pile under her arm. Alys protested feebly, tried to laugh, and ended by a burst of almost hysterical tears.

"You are much too tired," said Edmund, tenderly. "Mind, this is never to happen again. I shall speak to my mother."

"No, no: don't do that. Indeed—indeed, I don't want to be ungrateful——"

Sobs choked her utterance, and Edmund ground his teeth.

"There is no need for gratitude. She knows—or ought to know—what I feel for you, Alys. I expected her to treat you as a daughter."

Alys gave a little start, and drew herself away from him.

"Yes—a daughter. Let me speak, dearest. I have long loved you, and have wanted to tell you of my love. My father bade me wait a little while; but he has known for months what my feelings were. I must speak now; and I must make others understand. You shall never be teased and trampled on again,—Alys, my sweet, delicate darling—my white flower!"

He was going on in the full confidence of possession, when a little cry from her interrupted him.

"I am very sorry," she murmured; "but, no, no, Edmund, it can never be."

"Can it not?" he answered, almost smiling at what he took to be her timidity. "Indeed, my darling, it can. You must not be misled by a little sharpness of tongue on my mother's part. Perhaps you mistook—or perhaps she thought that you were a little unkind to me. You have been very cold of late, you know. But, dear Alys——"

"You must not go on," said Alys, shrinking from him. "I could not; it is no use."

"What is no use?" he said, brought at last to see that her words had a definite meaning.

"I could not—marry you. I do not care for you enough. Oh, indeed, I like you very much as a friend," she said, warned by the gathering gloom on Edmund's face that she had given pain, and perhaps offence; "but not—not as anything else. You must not think of such a thing."

"But, Alys, you are imagining that my people would object, and I can assure you that I have influence enough——"

"No, it is not that," said Alys. Then, with gathered firmness, she went on, "I should not mind any opposition, if only I loved a man well enough."

"But could you not go through it for my sake?"

"No," said Alys, trembling from head to foot, but resolute. And yet she was sorry to bring such a shadow to his face.

He let her go, and she sank into her chair again, while he stood by her silently wrestling with a hundred shapes of

anger, sorrow, resentment, and bewilderment. He had been almost sure that she cared for him not very long ago.

"I am sorry," he brought himself to say at last, in a very gentle tone, "that you cannot care for me, Alys. I thought I could have made you happier. I should have taken you out of this house, and given you a house of your own. But as you say you cannot——"

"I cannot; indeed, I cannot," she cried, desperately. "Edmund, don't ask me again."

He looked at her intently for a few seconds before he spoke. "I am not sure, Alys," he said at last, "that you don't care for me a little—more than you know. Don't be angry with me for saying so. Forget it, and let me be your friend still. You have not so many friends that you can afford to throw one away."

"That is true," she said, sorrowfully. "Yes, I shall be glad of your friendship; but please—please do not talk to me of anything else."

"Not unless you give me leave."

She passed over this remark as if it were not worth notice.

"And will you help me to get away from here? I don't mind where I go. I believe I could live somewhere for a pound a week, could I not? I have more than that; and I should not want very much. I only want a little quiet place —to myself—where I could be happy——"

And then she broke down again, and cried unrestrainedly. Edmund laid his hand on her shoulder, and stood by her with an aching heart. What could he do to help her? Oh, why had he said nothing to her on that November afternoon in Croyland Square?

He consoled her at last by promising to do his best to find her a new home, to speak to his father—everything possible and impossible that occurred to him by way of comfort, and then he advised her to go to bed, as she was quite worn out; and Alys obeyed, being only too glad to escape the ordeal of dinner downstairs and the drawing-room afterwards.

She had a bad headache next day, and could not lift her head from her pillow; but Julian waited on her assiduously, and Alys conjectured that Edmund had interposed on her behalf, for Mrs. Creighton would not otherwise have allowed Julian to remain beside her. In the evening she felt well enough to dress and descend to the schoolroom; and when she was comfortably settled there, to her infinite astonishment Mr. Creighton was announced.

He was very kind in manner, commented on her pale looks, and told her she must take care of herself. Alys expected him to speak of Edmund, and waited with red cheeks for the moment when she must tell him that she had refused his son; but the lawyer had other business on hand. Edmund was almost independent of him, and he was not going to meddle with other people's love affairs. So, after a little preparatory humming and hawing, he began—

"I have some notion, my dear, that you are not quite so comfortable with us as you were at first. Edmund said something about your wishing to find another place of residence."

"You have been very kind in keeping me so long," said Alys, resolutely, "and I am very much obliged to Mrs. Creighton and yourself; but I think it would be better if I had some little independent place of my own."

"Seventy or eighty pounds a year will not get you much of a home," said Mr. Creighton. "But another home might be open to you. You will remember that I have been making inquiries about your relations—your step relations, that is to say: your father's daughter, who is entitled to an equal portion with yourself."

"Have you found her?" said Alys, eagerly.

"I think, my dear, I have. But you must not expect too much. She has not, perhaps, had the advantages you have had. Not the education, you know." And Mr. Creighton nodded significantly.

"I know—I understand," said Alys. "But tell me about her. Have you heard from her?"

"My first intimation from her," said the lawyer, slowly,

"came through a Mr. Moor, a gentleman of good family in the north of England, who is acquainted with Miss—Miss Lorimer, and who called here to make inquiries. I think you saw him: he was in the drawing-room for a few minutes. I brought him home with me from the office."

"I remember," said Alys, looking down. She remembered, because the man with the soft eyes and the peaked beard had looked at her so persistently that she had thought him rude. His stare was now explained.

"Through Mr. Moor I have been put into communication with Miss Lorimer; and I have to-day received a letter from her which I am requested to put into your hands. You will note, my dear," said Mr. Creighton, kindly, "that there may be little imperfections of expression and diction which must not be reckoned against her too heavily: she has not been brought up like you. Her grandfather was a yeoman farmer; and I believe she herself now manages the farm. As you will see, she has taken her grandfather's name."

Alys slowly opened the letter that he had placed in her hands. She could not help seeing that the paper and the envelope were poor and mean-looking; and that the handwriting, though clear, was not what we call an "educated" hand. She read the letter, therefore, with some misgivings.

It was very short.

"Quest, 15*th May*, 188—

"My dear Sister,—We do not know each other; but I think it is time we became better acquainted. Will you come down to Quest for a few weeks or months, as suits you best? We have plenty of room, and I shall be ready for you, and pleased to see you any time.

"Yours truly,

"Lisbeth Verrall."

"Yes," said Alys, rising from her seat, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. "Yes, I will go, Mr. Creighton; will you thank Mrs. Creighton for all her kindness to me, and tell her that I am going to my sister? To my sister—at Quest."

CHAPTER IX.

CONDITIONS.

"So she is coming," Frank said, slowly.

"Have you anything against it?" Lisbeth asked, with a flash of her dark, large-pupilled eyes.

She had been walking to the village of Crosthwaite, which stood in the valley beside the river, and looked like a dream of beauty when seen from Quest; and Mr. Francis Moor had joined her on her homeward way. She had tried to get rid of him, for she had a conscientious objection to doing the thing of which she knew that Lady Adela would disapprove, but he could not be shaken off. He beguiled her from that subject at length by speaking of the newly-found half-sister, with whom Lisbeth had put herself into communication.

"I have nothing against it—why should I have? I am the guilty party, since I insisted on interviewing Mr. Creighton; but I did not fancy that you would be so anxious to see her immediately, or perhaps——"

He hesitated, and Lisbeth took up the word.

"Or that she would be so ready to come?"

Frank laughed. "You are abnormally clever, Lisbeth. Well, yes, I thought that London would be more attractive than our Cumberland hills to a young lady of Miss Lorimer's type."

"She must be a poor creature if she does not find *this* better than London!" said Lisbeth, with a superb wave of her hand towards hill and vale, which were bathed in the glorious sunlight of a brilliant June evening. She stopped short to look at the play of light and shade on a distant hill-side, and the flashing of a stream on its way to join the river, and it seemed to Frank—who looked at her face rather than at the landscape—as if sun and shadow were reflected in her eyes and on her noble brow. He was for a moment surprised: Lisbeth did not often put her emotions into words.

"I scarcely knew you cared so much for poor old Crosthwaite," he said lightly.

She turned from him and continued her walk up the rocky uphill road. "There's no place like home," she said softly.

"Is it Quest you love, then?"

"Quest—and all that's round it. The hills, the rivers, the look of the place," said Lisbeth, briefly. "No other spot would be the same to me."

"Couldn't you care for Moor End a little?" said Francis Moor, in a lower voice. He came closer to her as he spoke; but Lisbeth only quickened her pace a little, and went on her way unmoved, holding her head high.

"I like Moor End very well. It's a fine place, and always will be, so long as one stone holds to another. I don't wonder your mother's fond of it."

The reference to his mother threw Frank out a little. He believed that she had made it purposely.

"You know what I mean, Lisbeth——"

"If I do, Mr. Frank, you ought to see that I don't want to hear any more about it," said Lisbeth, sharply.

"But that's not fair," Frank rejoined. "You might hear a fellow out, Lisbeth, whatever kind of answer you mean to make him. You know well enough the feeling that I have for you, and that it is a serious one. I demand a hearing as a right—if you won't give it me as a favour." His voice dropped during the last few words.

Lisbeth compressed her lips, and to the keen-eyed observer at her side it seemed as though she turned a shade paler. But she did not relax her rapid pace, nor lower her haughty head.

"I've told you before," she said resolutely, "that I didn't want to hear talk of that kind. It's not fit, between you and me. Your mother would have good cause of complaint against me if I gave heed to it, and I don't mean her to have that."

"Has she spoken to you?" said Frank, in sudden alarm.

"No—not direct," said Lisbeth, with reluctant honesty;

"but I know what she means as well as most folk. 'I want my son to marry some one who will love Moor End as I do, and help to restore it,' she said to me once. Doesn't that show what she feels about your marriage?"

"But, Lisbeth, you would love Moor End!"

"I might love it, but I could not build it up again."

"And is this," said Frank, impetuously, "your only reason for refusing to listen to me?—that you cannot rebuild a ruin, or bring money to the man whom you would honour with your hand? Is that all?"

"No, that is not all."

Lisbeth's eyes wandered to the distant horizon; she seemed to be looking for a country that he could not see—for some unknown future which she was quicker to read than was Francis Moor.

"There is this also," she said, resolutely; "there is the unfitness of birth, of education——"

"Not of birth, Lisbeth. Your father was a gentleman."

"A pretty gentleman, from all I know of him!" cried Lisbeth, with sudden scorn. Then her voice softened repentantly. "I ought not to speak against him; I did not mean it—but you know yourself, Frank, that I never gained much from *him*. What good did he ever do me? Well, he was a gentleman, in your sense of the word; but he did not think fit to teach me anything, he left my upbringing to simple folk, he let me grow up like a weed—and a girl brought up in that way is not fit to live amongst gentry, nor to be treated by one of them as if——"

Frank interrupted her most angrily. "Lisbeth, you shall not say these things. I won't say that I see in you merely my equal, but you are my superior; you know you are. I always feel that I can learn from you—that I could depend on you—if you were my wife you could do anything with me."

"And is that how a husband should regard his wife?" Lisbeth said, hotly. "I should like a husband that I could depend on and learn from, not one that wanted petting and coaxing like a child by its mother."

"Is that what you think of me? Then, indeed, I can have no hope."

The pain in his voice touched Lisbeth more than she would acknowledge. She went on rapidly, with a hot flush on her dark face—

"I do not say that I think that of you. But you put yourself into that position by the words you use. You talk of depending on me. Don't you think you have depended on other people too long already? Why don't you go out into the world and work for yourself? Why are you always idling away your time, doing nothing but playing with your fiddle and writing verses and making pretty pictures? Do you call that work fit for a man?"

Frank stopped short in the road. He had turned rather white about the lips.

"You have said things to me like this before," he said, "but never quite so plainly. I see you despise me. . . . Good-bye, Lisbeth: we cannot even be friends if you think so badly of me."

Lisbeth was obliged, in common courtesy, to halt in her stately march along the road. Perhaps she would have held her position better if she could have gone on. But she turned and looked at him, and in spite of her resolution there was a quiver of her lip.

"You are wrong—I don't think badly of you," she said. "I only want you to see what you might do—and what you don't."

"Then you take an interest in me after all?"

"Yes," said Lisbeth, with a curious difficulty of speech —a nervous contraction of her throat, that made her voice low and thick, "yes—I take—an interest in you—Mr. Moor."

"Then—if I were to do what you wish—work and prove myself a man—you would perhaps——"

His eyes were shining, the colour had come back to his face with a rush: he held out his hand towards her. But Lisbeth drew back.

"No—no," she said abruptly; "I did not mean that."

The young man looked at her keenly; he had wit enough to note that there was more softness in her eyes than her words justified. He drew nearer, and spoke in a different tone.

"Lisbeth, you are always true and faithful," he said. "Be true to yourself and me. Isn't it possible that you might some day care for me?"

He was very near the truth. But Lisbeth made a violent effort to retain her self-command.

"Not in that way," she said, stiffly and drily.

"Not as a lover—a husband?"

She wanted to say "No." But for a woman of three-and-twenty, who has never told a lie in all her life, to begin with an absolute falsehood is too great a plunge. Lisbeth opened her lips, shut them again, and temporised.

"I would rather think of you as a friend," she said.

Frank sighed and drew back. "You are a cold-hearted woman, Lisbeth. You do not mind how much you hurt me. You take from me my only motive for ambition."

"And for work?" said Lisbeth, with sudden impatience, which came chiefly from the sting of her own pain. "Have you not your mother to think of—and Moor End?"

She turned from him with a swing of her handsome shoulders, a haughty uplifting of her handsome chin. As she walked along the road her lips were set closely together, her eyebrows levelled in a dark frown. She did not look like a very amiable woman—like a woman born submissive and gentle, as women are supposed to be. She had never been given much opportunity of learning these humbler virtues: from her birth she had been queen of those around her—from her veriest infancy mistress of Quest.

So she strode on proudly; and Francis Moor, angry, wounded, more sorely hurt than he had ever been in his life before, stood in the road where she had left him, scarcely knowing whether to advance or to retreat. Pride and wounded feeling won the day. He turned at last, and deliberately retraced his steps to Crosthwaite. It was not for his manhood, he thought, to humiliate himself further in

Lisbeth's eyes. It was plain that she wished to dismiss him, and he would not trouble her again.

He might have thought differently if he had seen Lisbeth's face ten minutes after she had left him. At first the frown seemed stamped upon it; gradually the frown passed into an expression of deep pain, and finally the tears filled her eyes, overflowed, and trickled down her cheeks. She was forced, then, to pause for a minute or two. Frank was well out of sight, and she was drawing near to Quest: it would never do to be seen by her man servants and maid servants with tears upon her face. There was a bank on one side of the road; she sat down, in the shadow of a great hawthorn bush, and wiped the tears away, but in a furtive manner, as if even there she feared that she should be observed. She had a strangely weak feeling, as if she had in some way done a thing that was a little beyond her strength, and overstrained herself.

She had some reason for thinking that she was observed. She knew Zadock's habits well. He had a trick of haunting her footsteps, of following her at a little distance like a watch-dog; and during her walk from Crosthwaite he had been tracking her on the green hill side, never once proceeding by the road, but keeping alongside, at about fifty yards distance from her, so that in case of necessity he might be at hand. Not that there ever *was* any necessity for his presence: Lisbeth was as strong as he, and quite capable of defending herself against any assault of tramp or highwayman; but she had grown used to Zadock's silent and stealthy companionship, and counted upon it unconsciously. Even as she dried her tears, she looked round for him—with a little trouble and apprehension, to be sure—and there he was already at her side.

"What's wrong?" he asked, in the thick guttural tones which were almost unintelligible to any one save Lisbeth herself.

"Nothing, Zadock."

"Thee be cryin'. 'Tis that theer squoire, it be. Zadock'll larn 'im."

"Rubbish!" said Lisbeth, with great sharpness. "'Tis no such thing, Zadock, an' thee'll be pleased to hold tha tongue."

She always relapsed into dialect when she talked to Zadock: it did not seem as if he could understand her when she used the finer accent which she had partly learned at school and partly copied from Francis Moor.

The young man was silent. He stood on the shelving bank beside her, leaning upon a great oaken staff which he had planted firmly in the short thick turf. His broad shoulders, his shaggy head, his rough garments, gave him an oddly wild and almost savage appearance, not lessened by the ferocious gleam that showed itself for a moment in his blue eyes as he growled out a sullen threat.

"If squoire hurts tha, Zadock'll kill'n dead."

"Squire won't hurt me," said Lisbeth, bursting into a sudden laugh; "and Zadock needn't be such a fool."

But she held out her hand to him as she rose from her lowly seat and touched his arm lovingly.

"Poor old Zadock! Be good to Lisbeth, Zadock." It was the one admonition that had any effect upon the darkened mind of the poor faithful fool.

He received the caress with evident pleasure, smiling broadly from ear to ear, and the sullen darkness passed from his face like a cloud. Lisbeth also smoothed her brows, and prepared to walk homeward with her usual composure of manner.

She was a little abstracted, however, and did not notice that Zadock kept turning his head uneasily in one direction, as if he heard something that disturbed him. Not till Lisbeth stopped at her own gate did she also remark the sound. "There's a carriage on the road," she said. "Coming up here, too! It's late for people from Crosthwaite to be taking a drive."

The highway, on which she could see the vehicle, formed part of a favourite drive usually taken by the few tourists who came that way. The road or lane that led to Quest diverged at right angles from the highway, and was narrow

and grass-grown between low stone walls. Lisbeth, watching from the doorway, expected the carriage to pass this turning; but to her great surprise it turned into the lane.

"It's coming here. Who can it be?" she said to herself.

Then her face flushed. "It must be—it must be," she muttered. "I've mistaken the day, like the great dolt that I am. It's the girl, as sure as I live. And not half the things ready, nor the parlour cleaned up or anything. If it had only been to-morrow—what will she think of us all?"

There was not the slightest occasion for Lisbeth to distress herself either about the cleaning of the parlour or any other household detail; but it was part of her tradition that every nook and corner, how clean soever it might already be, should be scrubbed and rubbed, and polished and brushed in preparation for any honoured guest. And although Alys Lorimer was expected later in the week, Lisbeth considered that the place was by no means fit for her as yet.

But it was too late to do anything except stand helplessly at the door and wait for the arrival of the station fly, with its load of boxes on the roof. It halted at the gate in order to allow its occupant to get out; and Lisbeth saw a slim figure in black, with a slightly limping gait, approach her. She waited a moment for the stranger to speak first.

"Are you my sister Elizabeth?" Alys Lorimer asked, putting out two trembling hands.

Lisbeth took her into her arms, and kissed her before she replied. And with that fond embrace she also took her for ever into the depths of her capacious heart. The word "sister" took her by storm.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

THE oak parlour was Lady Adela Moor's favourite sitting-room at Moor End. It was a sombre-looking apartment, for the wood with which it was panelled had turned almost black with time, and a brilliant light would have been needed before the eye could appreciate the marvels of carving which adorned the high mantelpiece and various articles of furniture about the room. This brilliant light was, however, seldom to be procured. The windows faced southeast, and at mid-day, no doubt, sunshine might stream into the room; but the windows themselves were narrow and deeply set in the massive thickness of the outer wall, and the panes were small and of ancient greenish glass, with a patch of colour here and there. Only when, in the height of summer, they were flung wide open, could air and sunshine penetrate the dim recesses of Lady Adela's sanctum; and, even then, the pushing sprays of rose and jessamine, with which that side of the house was overgrown, veiled the light of heaven with a hase of greenery.

Yet Lady Adela loved the room. She was conservative at heart, and loved old ways, old habits, old memories; and the ladies of Moor End who had lived there before her had all made the oak room their favourite resting-place. There were miniatures upon the walls, mostly the wives and daughters of the former masters of Moor End; and Lady Adela liked to sit among them and dream at times of the daughters that Frank would give her, and the new miniature which would then be placed upon the wall. Her own hung there already, in white satin, as a bride.

The June evening was so warm, the moonlight so clear and steady, that she had not lighted the wax candles in their silver sconces, nor even the pretty lamp in modern brass and copper work which Frank had bought for her in London, and which she secretly and silently despised for its

newness. She liked the moonlight, and it was an economy not to burn candles. So she sat quietly, looking out at the fantastic shadows on the pathway, and trying to disguise from herself the fact that she was anxious because her son Francis had not come home to dinner.

She seldom called him Frank,—only in moments of expansion, and when mother and son were quite alone together. Francis had been a favourite name among the Moors, and she loved it for the sake of his ancestors. She had come of a noble race, but she seemed to have identified herself thoroughly with the family—ruined and impoverished as it was—into which she had married; and—although Frank was not man of the world enough to notice it—she never in her life made an open comparison between the glories of her own old home and the meagreness and the poverty of Moor End. She had given up the Willoughbys: she was a Moor, like her husband and her son.

Francis was not often absent at the dinner hour without sending her an explanatory message. He was very fond of his mother, and considerate of her comfort. But on this occasion he had gone out without saying whither he was bound, or when he meant to return; and Lady Adela, calm as she looked, was very anxious in her mind.

She had been a lovely woman: she was a graceful woman still. Her fine white skin was almost unwrinkled, her bronze hair almost untouched by time; her quiet brown eyes, with the drooping eyelids, which gave a slight haughtiness to her expression, were still soft and bright. But she had never altered her widow's garb; and the long floating cap-strings, as well as the sombre hue of her dress, gave her a peculiar dignity of bearing, quite irrespective of her age.

At last the well-known step was heard. She thought it was heavier and slower than usual, and she turned her face anxiously to the door. It opened to admit her son; and he spoke at once in his accustomed tones—perhaps, even, with a sort of gaiety which struck her as a little forced.

"Why, mother! All in the dark! I never saw any one with such a taste for midnight gloom!"

"Do you call it gloom when this lovely moon is shining?" she asked, as he came to her side and kissed her on the cheek. Was it only the moonlight that made him look so pale?

"Ah!—the moon! Well, it is glorious, I acknowledge. I've had a long walk—over the hills: I hope you did not wait dinner for me, mother; I must beg your pardon for running away."

"I did not wait, dear: I knew you would be here as soon as you could. But have you had no dinner?"

Frank laughed—a little harshly, she thought. "I had all I wanted: my appetite was quite satisfied, thank you. Yes, really"—as she murmured a suggestion about the dining-room—"I had some ale at the Three Kings, an old-fashioned little place at Cardew; ale and bread and cheese, and I want nothing more."

"Nothing? You are quite sure—after that long walk, Francis?"

"Nothing at all, thank you. I'm a little tired—I think I shall go to bed soon."

He was standing beside her, with his hand on the arm of her chair. She laid her own upon it in a mute caress. Perhaps it touched him, for after a moment's hesitation he drew another chair forward and seated himself at her side, opposite the window, so that the moonlight fell full upon his face. Probably he was not aware of this fact; but Lady Adela was glad of it: she had a watchful eye for the changes of his countenance.

"Would you like the candles lighted, dear?"

"No, thanks: the moonlight is very jolly. I like it almost as well as you do, I think."

"It is a magnificent night."

There was a little silence again. The mother was vaguely conscious that something strange and novel was in the air: that her son was inwardly disturbed for reasons which she could not fathom. Was he going to tell her his trouble, or was he not?

"Mother," he said at length, his voice breaking abruptly

upon the luminous silence of the night, "I have something to say."

"Yes, Francis?"

"We have talked from time to time of my going away. Of getting an appointment, and all that sort of thing." He stopped short, suddenly, as if he did not know how to continue.

"Of course, dear boy. Whenever anything suitable is found for you I must let you go," said Lady Adela, tenderly.

"Mother, I think I can't wait for the suitable thing. I must go as soon as I can."

The mother's fears were stirred. She caught at her son's arm, nervously. "There is nothing wrong, Frank?"

"Nothing to make you unhappy, mother."

"But *you* are unhappy?"

"Never mind that," said Frank, quickly. "Don't ask me any questions just now. I *have* a reason for going—but there is nothing wrong. I see now that I ought to have gone long ago."

He sat brooding over the thought; and Lady Adela watched him with a beating heart, but a firm determination not to probe or question him unless he seemed to wish her to do so. She was a wise woman, and knew that pain dies away more easily when it is not spoken about. And she divined the pain that gave her son his reason for going away.

"I have wasted a good deal of time," Frank said, presently, with a great sigh. "I wonder what I can do now?"

"Lord Mountford spoke of the diplomatic service."

"Things cannot be got by interest nowadays, and I'm afraid I should have a poor chance at an examination."

"You might run up to London and see Lord Mountford," suggested Lady Adela, rather faintly. She was never desirous that her son should leave her when it came to the point. But he took up the idea with some eagerness.

"Yes—yes, I might. I'll go to-morrow, if you don't mind, mother. Mountford's a good old boy: he might suggest something. And—mother——"

"Yes, Frank?"

"You won't mind if I say—that I shall accept the first thing that offers—suitable or not?"

Lady Adela made a little sound of dismay. Then—"Oh, my boy, has it gone so deep with you?" she said, in spite of all her resolutions.

Frank rose and stood leaning against the window-sill, with his face turned away from her.

"I'm not sure that I know—no, I won't say that—I do know what you mean. She won't have anything to say to me, mother; and—it has—it has—cut me—rather."

It was impossible to keep the tremor out of his voice, and tears of sympathy rose to his mother's eyes, although she was devoutly thankful that Lisbeth Verrall had justified the trust reposed in her.

"My dear boy! But if she does not care for you—you know she is not of our class and—excellent as she is——"

"Oh, yes; of course, I know you would be pleased," said Frank, rather savagely. "I did not mean to tell you—but it seems you guessed."

"I am not pleased at anything which gives you pain," said Lady Adela.

Frank turned round. "Mother! Would you not help me then? I believe half her reason for rejecting me is that she thinks you would object. If only you would go to her and plead my cause——"

"*I* go to her? My dear boy!" said Lady Adela, laughing, and almost crying in her mixture of amusement and dismay. "I am not anxious to see you marry the Mistress of Quest!"

"Oh, I understand!" said her son, stiffly. He moved into the darkness that hid the middle of the room, and stood there with his hands thrust into his pockets. "You are sorry that I am pained, and yet you will do nothing to prevent it. It is hardly logical, I think."

"Dear Frank, I did not mean to grieve you. But you know, without my saying so, that there are objections."

"I don't see them. Her father was a gentleman. She is

very beautiful—all the world acknowledges that. She is good, clever, not badly off—I do not see how you can wish for a better daughter-in-law."

"I would rather not discuss it, dear," said Lady Adela, with elaborate gentleness. "And—there seems to be no need."

"Because she has refused me, you mean? Or rather, she would not listen to me. I believe she *would* listen," said Frank, with kindling vehemence, "if only she thought you would approve! Mother—mother, could you not?"

"My dear Frank, it is quite impossible. And, besides, I think Miss Verrall is a woman who knows her own mind."

This was a statement he could not gainsay; and he sighed, therefore, but was silent.

"It will perhaps be a good thing," said his mother, soothingly, "for you to go to Lord Mountford and talk to him about your future. He may be able to do something for you."

"Anything to get away! to work for myself!" said Frank, almost fiercely. "I have wasted my life long enough."

He turned to leave the room; but, moved by some softer impulse, came back to his mother and kissed her on the forehead.

"Good-night, mother. I hope I have not said too much. You must forgive me."

She was only too ready to forgive. She wept bitterly over her boy's pain and sorrow when she was alone; and yet she rejoiced. Elizabeth Verrall had behaved nobly, she said to herself; and she would take an early opportunity of showing her appreciation. She did not realise that any such mark of approbation would be particularly offensive to Lisbeth.

Francis Moor carried out his designs. He was up early, packed his own portmanteau, and drove in the pony-cart—the only vehicle he possessed—to the station. "I shall not come back again," he said to his mother, half defiantly, "until I have found something to do."

Lady Adela occupied herself all the morning in writing

long letters to her most influential friends. Lord Mountford was a distant cousin, and might be expected to be kind; but whether he would be effective as well as kind she could not be sure. It was just as well to write to him, and to others of his degree, concerning Frank's requirements.

When two or three days had elapsed, she went to call on Elizabeth. But, whether by accident or design, Lisbeth did not appear—could not be found anywhere. Lady Adela had to come away without seeing her. But she had her reward. She saw, as she said afterwards, the most perfect dream of beauty that she had ever yet beheld.

A girl in white, sitting on the doorstep—that was all. But a girl whose grave, sweet, delicate loveliness quite fascinated Lady Adela. The soft golden hair, the tender tinting of the complexion, the graceful poise of the dainty limbs, were perfection in her eyes. It was exactly the kind of beauty Lady Adela admired.

"Who can it be?" she speculated, as she drove back to Moor End. "A lodger, I suppose. I did not know that the Verrall's would take lodgers—I thought they were above that. The girl looks like a lady. . . . It is just as well that Frank is away, poor boy; for a man's heart is sometimes caught at the rebound, and one does not know who this girl can be. Surely not a village beauty: she has a look of extraordinary refinement."

It was thus that she thought of Alys Lorimer; but she did not find out for some time the relationship that existed between the girl and her step-sister, Lisbeth.

The days went on, and she did not hear very encouraging reports of Frank's search for employment. Lord Mountford had shaken his head and spoken of the impossibility of getting anything now-a-days except through competitive examination; and Frank was by no means qualified for such a test. But he had been very kind to Frank—had asked him to his house, and introduced him to a great many people, and Lady Adela proudly hoped that Frank might fall in love with an heiress, and write home that he was going to be married before the end of the season.

"That is just what would suit Frank best," she said to herself; for although she was Frank's mother, she was not lacking in discrimination. "He has not enough energy to work without a personal motive: he will never succeed in anything that requires routine. But he would make an excellent county gentleman—an excellent proprietor! If only we had the money, what a fine place Moor End might be!"

And as Lady Adela wandered restlessly along the echoing passages, and in and out of the old-fashioned rooms, she saw visions of restored glories and new splendours which made her heart ache with longing. The love of a house is sometimes as absorbing as the love of a man. Lady Adela had a passion for Moor End.

At last she had a letter from Frank, couched in more cheerful terms than any of his previous epistles.

"I have had luck at last," he said. "Mountford has introduced me to a friend of his who wants a private secretary. He is rather an eccentric person—Lord Raynflete, of whom you have probably heard—a philanthropist, and something of a literary man. He is very wealthy, but lives with great simplicity, and has a most wonderful library at one of his houses, and a splendid private gallery at another. He wants somebody to be a kind of companion, I believe: to write his letters and talk literary gossip to him —at least, that is all I have heard mentioned at present, and it does not sound much; but Mountford says it is an excellent opening, and that I may get fairly launched in either literary or political life through Raynflete's help.

"I have not seen the old fellow yet, but we have corresponded, and I must say I like his letters. I suppose he is not really old, but one thinks of him as an antique, somehow or other. If he engages me, he won't want me till September, so you will have me back on your hands for a couple of months."

Lady Adela laid down the letter and sighed. She did not like the proposed situation at all. It seemed to her ridiculous for Frank to accept it. Yet—as Mountford recom-

mended it, it must be worth having. Frank said nothing about salary. She earnestly hoped that he did not mean to accept one. She would not mind his doing the work for nothing.

She took down the Peerage from a shelf, and looked up Lord Raynflete. "Seventh baron: three country houses: one in town. Age, thirty-seven. Unmarried." Lady Adela smiled.

"Silly boy!" she murmured, thinking of Frank's expressions. "Old, indeed! Why, the man will probably marry in six months. I see he only succeeded to the title three years ago—which accounts for my not knowing anything about him. But I should hardly think that he would want a 'male companion' very long." And Lady Adela put away the volume, feeling vaguely relieved.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW LIFE.

Alys Lorimer experienced a new sensation.

She had scarcely ever known what it was to be taken in any one's arms, and caressed in the motherly fashion which Lisbeth involuntarily adopted. She was, indeed, just the sort of delicate flower-like girl whom many a woman would have been pleased to pet and fondle; but the circumstances of her life had precluded her from any such indulgences. From the time when she began to be useful and companionable—an extremely early age—her father had monopolised her time, her interest, and her affections, save for the few months that she had spent at school.

Since his death, all had been changed, indeed. She had discovered that her father's affection for her had been singularly selfish, and founded on absolute disregard of the claims of others: he had left her, with what seemed to her a mere pittance, to the tender mercies of a cold and unsym-

pathising world. In her desolation she had taken refuge at the Creightons only to find that they (with the exception of Edmund and Julian) cared for her no longer when she was poor: and she had hailed the letter from her unknown sister with a joy largely mingled with fear, lest this new relationship should also turn out to be a delusion.

It did not seem to be one. Lisbeth's greeting was exquisitely tender—perhaps all the more so because she had so few people to whom she could show tenderness. Alys felt at home with her at once.

The driver of the station-cab asked a question about the boxes; and Miss Verrall bidding Alys step inside the house, came forward to answer him. But as Alys entered the rather narrow passage, she met with an unexpected shock. It was Zadock's wild figure that confronted her, his rough mop of hair and the heavy staff in his hand making him terrible to the timid girl. He said something which she could not understand, and almost fancying that she had come across a madman, she shrank away from him with signs of unmistakable affright.

It was a peculiarity of Zadock's that he could not bear to see people show signs of alarm at his appearance. This was the one thing that irritated him almost to madness. He shook his staff violently at the girl, who again recoiled, and chattered so angrily and so unintelligibly that Lisbeth, when she turned back, found Alys almost ready to faint with terror, and trying to hide herself behind the open door.

"Zadock, you are naughty!" she said, with severity; and Zadock slunk away like a whipped hound, and disappeared into the kitchen regions. "Did he frighten you? You poor child!" said Lisbeth. "He doesn't mean anything; he did not know who you were, and one can't explain to him very well."

Then, finding that Alys still looked white and tremulous, to the girl's great astonishment Lisbeth simply took her up in her strong arms like a baby, and carried her bodily into the sitting-room, where she laid her on the sofa, and presently brought her something hot and strong to drink, after

which Alys coughed, laughed, and sat up again, feeling quite revived.

"You must not mind him," said Lisbeth, solicitously. "He does no one any harm."

"Who is he?"

"Well, he is my step-uncle, but I treat him like a brother or a cousin; he was the same relation to my mother that you are to me."

"And he lives here?" Alys repressed a little shudder of disgust.

"Yes, he lives here. If he had been—like other men, he would have been master here when my grandfather died. Being what he is, you see, I have to be master and mistress too of Quest."

Alys looked round the room a little wonderingly. She had never sat as a guest in such a room before. It was much like the parlours of ordinary farmers' wives: rich in antimacassars and queer old pictures, samplers and big shells. There was a harmonium with books piled upon it, and the furniture was covered in green "rep." There were stiff white curtains at the low window, and pots of musk and geranium upon the sill. Alys had seen something like it when she went into the country with her father from time to time, and had even once lodged in a very similar room; but it gave her a shock to find her sister—even her step-sister—the owner of such an apartment.

"What lovely flowers!" she said at last, looking at the centre table, which was adorned by a great china bowl, full of roses and other summer blossoms.

"I am glad you like them," said Lisbeth, with a little hesitation. "I've noticed that folks from London think a deal of our roses."

She thought of Lady Adela's room, which was never without its supply of sweet-smelling flowers; and although she seldom filled the old punch-bowl for herself, she resolved that it should never be empty while Alys was at Quest. The girl looked up smiling.

"Don't *you* care for them?" she asked.

"I like 'em growing in the garden best," said Lisbeth, frankly. "It seems a sort of murder to pick them and let them die in a stuffy room. But that's just my own poor country notion: town folk like to see them on tables in the house."

"Yes, I think they are lovely—and so sweet."

"I'll put some more in your room. If you feel rested now, would you like to go upstairs and take off your things? I'll have tea for you by the time you're ready. You must excuse us not being prepared, as it were: your room is all right, but——"

"Did you not know I was coming to-day?" said Alys, rising to her feet.

"It was all my fault: I thought it was to be Thursday, and to-day's Tuesday," said Lisbeth. "But it makes not a bit of difference: not one bit."

But she had not counted on the delicate poise of the girl's sensibilities, which had already been a good deal disturbed that day. Alys wrung her slender hands together and then burst into tears.

"I always do something wrong—I make mistakes—I'm not wanted wherever I go!" she sobbed.

"My dear, you are wanted here," said Lisbeth, not quite comprehending, but perfectly pitiful. "I want you: it does not matter which day you come."

She drew Alys close to her, and held her, while the overstrung girl sobbed away her misery on the broad supporting shoulder of her step-sister. It was with a quivering little smile that Alys at last looked up.

"How good you are to me!" she said, gratefully. "I never met any one so kind. I am sure I shall be happy here——"

But the next moment she shrank and shivered again, for in the open doorway she saw the figure of Zadock Verrall with his oaken staff.

Lisbeth turned her head also, and saw. Then, still holding Alys within one arm, she signalled to Zadock to draw near.

"Don't show that you're nervous," she said, in a low tone to Alys. "He doesn't like it. Zadock, look: this is my sister—my dear sister. You must be good to her, Zadock! you must love her: do you hear?"

But for once her exhortation seemed to have no effect. Zadock growled like an angry dog, and moved his stick. Then Lisbeth laid aside her gentleness, and spoke like an offended queen.

"Put away that stick, sir. What do you mean by behaving so badly? Put it down—down on the floor."

With some hesitation, Zadock sulkily complied.

"Good boy!" said Lisbeth, softening her voice. "Now, go away—leave the stick. And remember—you must love my little sister."

"My stick," said Zadock, looking at it as it lay on the ground.

"No, Lisbeth's stick. Lisbeth will keep it for Zadock—when he is good."

The poor imbecile stumped away down the stone passages, muttering to himself, and Alys' terrified eyes followed him as long as he was in sight. But Lisbeth gave her a reassuring smile.

"He is not often so cross," she said. "I suppose he is a little bit jealous of you. He will soon be good-tempered again; and he is quite harmless and gentle—he follows me about like a great dog."

"He never hurts any one?"

"Never—unless any one is cruel to animals or children. Then he sometimes flies into a rage. But that happens very seldom."

Alys listened, and tried to believe it, but wished in her heart that she had known of Zadock's existence before she came to Quest.

She followed Lisbeth up the narrow stairs, wondering a little at the sort of place she had come to, and marvelling at the apparent absence of servants; but on the landing she saw a red-armed, red-cheeked damsel, who seemed to have been carrying her boxes to the bedroom. "Are they all

here, Sally?" her mistress asked; and Sally replied that there was still another to come. Alys was amazed to see her reappear in a minute or two, carrying with apparent ease a box which had taxed the energy of two London servants at the Creightons' house; and she could not forbear an exclamation of surprise.

"Won't she hurt herself? That heavy box!"

Lisbeth looked round and smiled.

"That won't hurt her. We're strong and hearty in these parts of the world. Why"—lifting the box herself to another part of the room—"that's a mere feather-weight. I've carried much heavier weights than that."

"You must be strong! I could not lift it. I tried this morning."

"I should think you couldn't. We must get some colour in your face by and by. New milk and fresh air ought to do something for you," said Lisbeth, almost pityingly. "We've no such white faces here."

"I ought to be well here, I think. I've not been quite strong lately," said Alys, falling easily into a confidential vein. "Oh, what a lovely view from this window!"

The room had two windows—one south, one east, and the stretch of hill and dale on which the girl's eyes now rested was truly magnificent. The evening lights and shades were especially lovely, and Alys stood entranced, hardly noticing that Lisbeth was busy with her boxes, until she turned round to find them all unstrapped and uncorded.

"Oh, you should not have done all that. I could have done it, or the maid."

Lisbeth laughed a little. "The maids are too busy to do little things of that sort. I'll look after you—never fear. Now I'll leave you, and you'll come down when you're ready. You must be famished for your tea."

Alys did not feel hungry, but she wanted to change her dusty dress for a fresher one. She was still in deep mourning, and she had observed with some surprise that Lisbeth's dress did not present a sign of recent bereavement. As a matter of fact, Lisbeth had absolutely refused to

go into mourning for a father whom she had scarcely ever seen.

Alys liked her room. It was large and airy, though low-ceiled, and it had an air of cleanliness and spotless purity which pleased her taste. Curtains and bed furniture were of old-fashioned white dimity, smelling of rose-leaves. The floor was covered with matting, and a rug or two; the tables and chairs were painted green. Lisbeth had made the room ready, and an unconsciously artistic taste had guided her eye. The room seemed quite as pretty to Alys as some much belauded "æsthetic" rooms that she had seen in London; and she wondered why it should be so different from the terrible little parlour downstairs. The answer was plain, if she had but known it. Farmer Verrall's mother was responsible, in the first instance, for the parlour—Lisbeth only for the bedroom.

Alys came downstairs in time to be surprised again by the sight of her sister carrying a heavy tray into the parlour, and beginning herself to spread the table. It seemed to her extraordinary that the mistress of Quest should do this common domestic work. She had come with some vague idea of Lisbeth as a stately country gentlewoman, with a poultry farm, and plenty of servants to wait on her—she found a capable, housewifely woman, to whom nothing in the way of work seemed to come amiss, wearing a big apron, and treating her maids with a familiarity which Alys would have considered unladylike in other circumstances. But Lisbeth was different from any one she had seen before. With all her domestic ways, she was a splendidly handsome woman, and in spite of her homely accent and plain dress, she did not seem to lose one jot of her dignity. It was she who brought in almost every plate and dish, much to Alys's bewilderment, not knowing that this was Lisbeth's way of showing attention to her guest. And when the meal was ready, she hardly joined in it, but hovered over Alys, and attended to her wants with a hearty care and hospitality which was not only strange but charming.

Then when the tea, with its accompaniments of boiled

ham and poached eggs, hot cakes and jellies, had come to an end, Alys was taken off into the kitchen "to see Aunt Maria."

"Aunt Maria" was an old sister of Farmer Verrall's. She sat in a great chair by the kitchen fire, worn, aged, crouching over the blaze, rousing herself now and then to knit a little, or to scold the servants, who moved round her as if she were but a piece of furniture, and bent only on one thing—on keeping possession of the chimney corner, which had been hers for many a long day. She was rather deaf and rather blind, and very forgetful; and nothing could make her understand who Alys was, or what she was doing there. But she was not an unpleasing object in her white cap and comfortable old Paisley shawl; and it was very plain that she adored Lisbeth—as everybody about the place —Alys was quick to see—adored her and obeyed her.

But the sight of an old person like Aunt Maria, and of a half-witted man like Zadock on the premises depressed Alys a little; and she was glad to escape with Lisbeth into the fragrant sweet-scented garden, where they watched the moon rise over the distant hills.

"It is very quiet here," said Alys.

"Too quiet, perhaps; you won't like it," said Lisbeth, with concern.

"Oh yes, I think I shall. It is a very lovely place. And I suppose"—rather timidly—"that you have friends here?"

"Not many," said Miss Verrall of Quest.

"I met somebody I knew as I came up here in the fly," said Alys, with a sudden blush. "Somebody I have seen before, I mean. That Mr. Moor, who came from you to Mr. Creighton."

"Yes, you would pass him on the road," said Lisbeth quietly.

"Had he been here?"

"No."

Alys wondered at her curt answer.

"He is a very handsome man, is he not?" she said, after a little pause.

"Some people think so. 'Handsome is as handsome does,'" quoth Lisbeth.

"Isn't he nice, then? Isn't he good?"

"There's no harm in him. But he's idle. Five and twenty, and nothing to do in life! I couldn't live like that if I were a man."

"I am sure you would not," said Alys. "I can see that. But he looks *nice*."

"I don't say he isn't. I've known him nearly all my life," said Lisbeth, shortly, "and I think as well of him as—of most people. It's time to go in, I'm afraid, my dear; you are shivering, and we have prayers now—if it isn't too late already."

"Prayers!"

"Yes. Grandfather always had them, and I like to think that nothing's changed since his time," said Lisbeth, quietly.

So to prayers they went, in the big raftered kitchen, where men and maids alike assembled, and where Lisbeth, in her simple stately manner, read a short Psalm, and with all the others said the Lord's Prayer aloud. It was the shortest and baldest of functions; but it gave Alys a sense of repose, of strength and confidence, to which she had long been a stranger. Lisbeth's full clear voice reciting holy words seemed to assure the girl of future happiness, peace, and goodwill.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DIE IS CAST.

LIFE was full of surprises to Alys for some time to come, but gradually she settled down at Quest with a delicious feeling of ease and freedom. Even Zadock ceased to have any terror for her: she became much more fond of the kitchen than of the parlour, and was not averse to light domestic tasks—though these Lisbeth generally took away from

her when she could, for Lisbeth's desire was that she should be waited on, "just as she had been at home."

"But I wasn't waited on at home," said Alys, with a laugh. "Papa liked me to wait upon him."

"Oh, I dare say," said Lisbeth, rather drily.

"Lisbeth, why do you speak in that tone whenever I mention papa!"

"What tone, my dear?"

They were sitting on the doorstep shelling peas. But Alys's fingers forgot to be busy, as she answered the question.

"You speak as if—you did not like him."

Lisbeth was silent for a minute or two. "I don't know that we'd better talk about it," she said. "But perhaps I had better tell you what I think, once and for all. I've never had any reason to love my father. Perhaps you had. Though I'm not sure that you had either, if the truth was told."

"Lisbeth, what do you mean?" said Alys, the conscious colour creeping into her pale cheeks.

"I mean that I think he was selfish not to provide for you better. Why, Grandfather Verrall did much better than that for me. Of course, I'm not going to take the few paltry pounds your father left behind, Alys. It's all yours, to do what you like with. I've got Quest."

"Well," said Alys, with rather a tremor in her voice, "did not papa really do his best for you by leaving you to your grandfather's care? You have benefited by it, Lisbeth."

"No thanks to him. He didn't care what became of me. And there was no likelihood *then* of my being mistress of Quest, because Zadock was all right—until——"

"Yes, until——"

Lisbeth rose from her seat and spoke deliberately. "Until your father, when he came here, struck him and threw him down upon the stones so that his poor head was never the same again. There, Alys, I've never got over that, and I'm afraid I never shall. Poor Zadock would have

been like anybody else but for him. And that's the reason I never put on a scrap of mourning for him, as I should have done for decency's sake, if it had only been *me* that he had hurt or neglected; but I could not do it when I thought of yon poor boy."

She gave Alys no chance to reply. She walked away into the kitchen, with her big bowl of peas in her hand; and the girl was left alone upon the doorstep.

She was very much shocked, yet not very much surprised. She knew her father's selfish and violent disposition very well, and it was by no means astonishing that he should have knocked the boy out of his way. But Alys was by no means strong-minded: on the contrary, she had more than her share, perhaps, of womanish fears and little superstitions. And she was suddenly possessed by a new terror of Zadock, and of the strange aversion that he still showed for her. Was there some occult reason for this dislike, founded on a kind of innate knowledge that she was her father's daughter? Was it to be her fate to suffer—somewhere, somehow—for her father's violence? and would Zadock be the instrument by which vengeance descended upon her head?

She looked up suddenly, and there was Zadock before her at the garden gate, peering at her, grimacing hideously, threatening her with the staff which Lisbeth had given back to him. He often behaved in this way when Lisbeth was not present. He seemed to take a pleasure in thoroughly frightening the girl, and in displaying his hatred to her. Alys, quite unnerved for the moment, almost screamed; and Lisbeth, hearing a cry came out of the kitchen to see whether anything was wrong. Zadock disappeared as soon as he heard her step; and Lisbeth, leaning over Alys, found her so white, so nervous, so trembling, that she reproached herself for having spoken to her of her father as she had done. But Alys explained.

"Zadock startled me: that was all," she said.

"You shouldn't be frightened of him: he really won't do you any harm," said Lisbeth, kneeling beside her, and draw-

ing the pretty golden head down on her breast. "We're a poor lot: we don't do anything to amuse you and hearten you up, do we? Are there none of your London friends you could ask down for a bit?"

"I had a letter this morning from Edmund Creighton," said Alys, recovering herself, "and he talks of coming here for his holiday—to this part of the world, I mean. I suppose he will take a walking tour. I wish—oh, I wish——"

"Well, what do you wish? My dove shall have all she wants," said Lisbeth, who liked to croon over Alys as a mother over her ailing child.

"If only he could bring Julian—his sister—with him! She is the one that I told you of—the nice one! Oh, we would have such good walks and expeditions together! You know you are so busy, Lisbeth dear," said Alys, with a sense of ingratitude strong upon her for her speech.

"Yes, I am busy," said Lisbeth, gravely. The gravity seemed to have grown on her of late. "Too busy to make you happy, I'm afraid. Have your friend, Alys: write and ask her to come here. She's not a fine young lady, you say: she'll put up with our homely ways."

Alys clung to her and kissed her, and thanked her; but she could not get over the feeling that she had hurt Lisbeth a little—that there had been for a moment a look of pain in Lisbeth's beautiful, honest eyes.

It *had* been a little lonely for her now and then. She had expected Lisbeth to be a companion to her all day long. Her notion of the mistress-ship of a house consisted in "giving orders" for half an hour after breakfast. But Lisbeth was up at four or five in the morning, working beside her maids, tramping about her farm, attending to sick beasts and birds, feeding healthy ones; showing everywhere that she knew what work was, and how to do it. The people she employed were all a little in awe of her: she had a shrewd eye and a quick tongue: she remembered that she was their mistress, and expected them to remember it, too. Alys stood aghast to hear her give to stalwart labourers a downright rating for drunkenness: she pleaded in vain when a servant

was summarily dismissed for pilfering; and she fled in positive alarm when she saw Lisbeth bring down a riding-whip with considerable force on the shoulders of a half-grown boy. It took a little time to show her—for Lisbeth never explained—that these acts were not the outcome of idle temper and irritability. The mistress of Quest was, at any rate, inflexibly just. The men whom she scolded could count on her for substantial help when their wives or children were ill, and knew that it was for their sake that she rated them: the servant had been warned half a dozen times before she was dismissed, and was then carefully sent back to her friends: she struck the boy because she had detected him in flagrant cruelty to a dumb animal. Alys admired her, wondered at her, and trusted her as she had never trusted any one before.

As for her own comfort, it was considered in every way. But to her amaze—and at first to her discomfort—she found that Lisbeth's own hands did everything for her that she required. No one else ever entered Alys's room: each detail of rearrangement, or of cleansing, was performed by Lisbeth herself. Alys remonstrated in vain; for Lisbeth only declared, when questioned, that "none of those girls" were fit to set foot in her sister's chamber, and that she and she alone was qualified to keep things as Alys would like them.

"I would rather do everything myself," said Alys, almost crying with vexation, when she found Lisbeth on her knees sweeping the floor.

"You're not meant for such work," said Lisbeth, briefly.

"Then I must go away; for I can't endure to give you the trouble."

"But it's no trouble, child: I like it. I do my own room out, too; I can't abide the girls upstairs: they never sweep under the beds."

"*I* would sweep under the beds, if you would let me," said Alys, laughing in spite of herself.

"I won't have you spoiling your pretty hands, and mak-

ing your back ache with house-work, so you needn't think it," said Lisbeth, decisively. "You've come here to be idle, and to get strong; so go downstairs to your drawing or your books, and leave me to get these rooms into fettle—as we north-country folk say."

Alys retreated obediently, but with a little pout: she was not quite happy until Lisbeth put her into good-humour by letting her darn some fine old house-linen that had got out of repair. Then she felt herself to be of some use, and her serenity was restored.

It was she, of course, who was sitting on the door-step with a book when Lady Adela drove up and inquired for Lisbeth. It must be explained that the farmhouse of Quest had three outer doors: the front-door, with spotless steps, which was seldom used; the side-door opening on the garden, and into a long passage which traversed the house to the back-door, near the kitchen. A central door also shut off the kitchen from that end of the house which was near the garden.

The steps by the garden-door formed Alys's favourite seat on fine afternoons. The whole valley lay stretched out beneath her like a panorama, and the sweet-scented flowers sent their fragrance straight up to her nostrils as she sat and read. She was not unaware of the attentions which Lady Adela had bestowed upon her, but she had been resolute in refusing to lift her eyes from the printed page in order to return the gaze which the visitor was bestowing on her from the pony-cart.

"Who was the lady who called?" she asked later.

"Lady Adela Moor: the mother of the Mr. Moor whom you saw in London."

"And why were you too busy to see her, Lisbeth?"

"I did not want to be interrupted. She came only for fresh eggs, in reality," said Lisbeth, drily.

"She looked—rather—nice."

"I don't think we know here what you mean by 'nice,'" said Lisbeth, a little roughly, a little impatiently.

"I mean—she is a lady."

"A lady! Oh yes. And that's why I don't want her here."

"Lisbeth!"

"I don't want fine ladies. I'm not fit company for such."

"Oh! *fine* ladies! No. But you are a lady yourself, Lisbeth, and fit company for any one," said Alys, decidedly.

She wondered whether Lisbeth would be annoyed by this remark; but Lisbeth only stood and looked at her, her hand on her hip, a slow colour rising in her clear olive cheek.

"Well!" said Alys, with a vague feeling of amusement. "Don't you agree?"

Her sister turned away with a sharp gesture, which might have meant annoyance, or, for some reason, simple pain.

"I don't want to agree," she said, with some fierceness of tone. "I am a working woman myself, and not of Lady Adela's sort."

She went back to her work; and Alys, still on the doorstep, looked before her with a dreamy smile.

"Have the Moors been rude to Lisbeth, I wonder?" she said to herself. "Or was she always like this to *them*? They are the sort of people that I think I should like to know. . . . It *is* lonely here. I shall be glad when Julian and Edmund can come."

But they could not come yet, because it was only July, and Edmund could not possibly leave town until the middle of August. Julian wrote rapturously of her delight in the prospect; for her mother and elder sisters were going to a German spa, and she was overjoyed to find herself allowed to accompany Edmund instead. But, as Mrs. Creighton remarked, where was the use of taking an awkward schoolgirl with them, when she would be just as happy—far happier, indeed—on a Cumberland fell-side? And Alys counted the days—at first—until her friends should come.

At first! She had ceased to count them before August came. Because, as it happened, there was a new interest in her life at Quest.

Early in July, as Lisbeth was stepping lightly about her dairy, the open window was shadowed by a man's figure, and a man's voice fell with startling effect upon her ear.

"Good morning, Miss Verrall! Mayn't I say Lisbeth? I have come back like a bad penny on your hands."

She could not resist the smile of welcome, nor prevent the flush that leaped like a flame into her face.

"Frank!—I beg your pardon, Mr.——"

"Leave it 'Frank,' dear, for the sake of old days. I have not come to bother you, Lisbeth. Only to tell you my news—news that I am sure you will be glad to hear."

She looked very beautiful, he thought, as she stood listening to him, tall and upright, in her cotton dress and white apron, above which her fine face showed like a rich tropical flower. There was colour in her cheek, fire in her deep dark eyes.

"You have found work!" she said, quickly.

"Yes. Am I a little worthier of respect in your critical mind, Lisbeth? It is only a beginning, you know: an introduction to political life; but it is worth something—more than perhaps it sounds."

Then he told her about his secretaryship—which was not to begin until October, as Lord Raynflete was at present in Scotland.

Lisbeth was a little disappointed. It seemed to her that it was a small thing to do—to become a sort of "companion" to another man. "Why, isn't it rather like being a servant?" she asked, bluntly.

For almost the first time, Francis Moor thought her unsympathetic. His brow contracted a little, the light in his eye died out. And Lisbeth saw instinctively that she had hurt him, but did not know how to put things right. She changed the subject somewhat abruptly.

"You have not seen my sister," she said. "Will you come into the garden? She is generally there."

Frank acquiesced. He was rather curious to see Alys in her new surroundings. He had thought her very pretty, in a rather pathetic way, when he saw her at Mr. Creighton's

for a minute or two; but he could not quite conceive of her at Quest.

"My mother is very anxious to see her," he said, as Lisbeth joined him at the door. "She saw her once in the distance, and wondered who your visitor was."

"Of course," said Lisbeth, with a smile, "she would never think it possible that Alys could be *my* sister."

It was one of the bitter things she sometimes said which made Frank angry. But he would not reply; he had made many good resolutions before he came, and one of them was to ignore Lisbeth's "unlucky" speeches. He called them "unlucky" when he did not want to think of them as hard.

"Here she is," Lisbeth said, in so soft a voice that he looked at her in sudden surprise. The dark, handsome face had softened too: the eyes were very tender. "Isn't she pretty?" she asked, with a faint smile upon her mouth. And then Frank looked away from her—to Alys Lorimer.

The girl was standing in a narrow path between two beds of crimson and pale-pink phlox, which reached almost to her waist, and formed a lovely background of colour to her slender figure in its white gown. She had taken off her hat, and her golden hair gleamed like an aureole about her head. When she raised her graceful, drooping head and looked at Frank with her innocent blue eyes, he felt a curious thrill. What girl had ever looked at him like that before?

She moved, and he saw that she was a little lame. The physical infirmity did not repel him: it only added to his impression of pathos—to the feeling that here was a lovely frail creature who needed to be guarded and guided in her way through the world. Lisbeth was a woman to lean on—and she had despised him for leaning: but Alys would cling and twine herself about one's heart. Was it not better to love a woman of this trusting, clinging kind? Perhaps, when he asked himself the question, the die was cast.

CHAPTER XIII.

BY CROSTHWAITE TARN.

"You are so different from your sister," said Frank.

This speech was not made to Lisbeth, as one might have anticipated: it was made to Alys Lorimer. But the month was no longer June.

Mr. Francis Moor had settled down at Moor End for the summer, and his mother's heart was relieved about him, for he had found work which seemed likely to satisfy his aspirations, and because he did not talk to her any more about Lisbeth Verrall. Certainly he was out a great deal, and did not tell her where he went; but she had a sort of impression, whence derived she could not tell, that the fancy for Lisbeth had weakened, if it had not passed away. She would have been sure of it if she had heard his speech to Lisbeth's sister.

Alys sat on a green mound near the edge of a bit of broken ground, overlooking the still, dark waters locally known as Crosthwaite Tarn. It was a lonely, secluded spot, lying high up among the hills: a clear pool, reputed to be almost fathomless, edged with high banks, above which towered greater heights, except on one side, where a tangle of rowan trees and rushes shaded the stream which ran from the Tarn, past the house of Quest, to join the river in the valley far below. It was a lovely day, full of sunshine and brightness, yet not sultry: it was seldom really hot among these moorland heights. Alys sat in the sunshine, and rejoiced.

"Yes, I am different, I know. Lisbeth is so beautiful."

"That is just what she says of you."

"Did you ever know any one like her?" Alys asked, eagerly. "She is so clever and capable, and yet so loving and kind!"

"She is all that," said Frank, in rather a reserved man-

ner. He did not very much want to talk about Lisbeth. He wanted to talk to Alys about herself.

"And I am so different!" sighed the girl. There was surely a hint of coquetry in her sweet blue eyes.

"Different!—yes! but—may I say it?"

"Say what?" said Alys, smiling.

"Ten thousand times more beautiful."

Ah, poor Lisbeth! So soon forgotten, so soon eclipsed, so quickly set in the lower place, when another woman came upon the scene! Frank did not know that he was fickle: he told himself that if Lisbeth had returned his love, he would have never changed.

"Ten thousand times more beautiful," he murmured, as he lay on the short crisp turf at Alys Lorimer's feet and gazed into her eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Moor, how can you?"

"Your sister always calls me Frank: do you think you could ever call me Frank?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so," said Alys, lowering her eyes. She, too, was under the spell. But she was not to blame: she did not know the things that had happened before she came to Quest.

"Why not?" he said, much more earnestly than the occasion seemed to warrant. "Would it be very difficult? Do you dislike the name?"

"Oh, no: not at all. But I do not know you well enough——"

"I feel as if I had known you all my life," said Frank. Then he sat up and looked away from her.

"I see—you think of me as a stranger. You think you will never know me any better—and you are not sorry. Is that it?"

"No, no, it is not that," said Alys, nervously. "But I have been here such a little while——"

"Time does not count," Frank broke in, impetuously. "There are souls that recognize each other at once, and know that they have met before—that they are made for each other to all eternity."

"That must be very rare—and rather inconvenient," said the girl, smiling. It seemed safest to take the matter as a kind of joke.

"You mean it is not our case."

"Of course."

His eyes were fixed so earnestly on her face that she turned it aside, and began plucking the stunted grass, the bits of wild thyme and heather which grew beside her. It was a comfort to be able to use her hands and look at the flowers—since she could not get up and walk away from him. And yet—why could she not? She did not know; there seemed to be a weight upon her limbs, a weakness in her muscles; she felt that she must stay where she was until it pleased him to let her go. It was like some sort of hypnotic influence — she could not move against his will.

When he spoke again, it was with a new tone in his voice. It was less eager, but it was the voice of one who deeply felt what he was saying.

"I want you to forgive me beforehand for what I am going to say. You will think it presumptuous—strange—altogether unheard of; but I must say it in spite of that. Is it possible that some day you might learn to look on me as not a stranger, but a friend? More than a friend, I mean . . . I know you, as you say, so little, and yet—it is presumption, I know—I love you, Alys—I love you."

His voice was lowered almost to a whisper. He lowered his face, lifted passionately a moment before; his head was near her arm; before she knew what he meant to do, he had kissed the delicate blue-veined wrist that lay upon her knee.

A flame sprang into Alys's face and eyes. She drew herself away from him; perhaps she would have sprung to her feet but for her lameness, which made her sometimes a little slow to move without help; but the look in her face made him rise—at any rate as far as his knees. He knelt and looked at her. "I beg your pardon," came involuntarily from his lips.

Then Alys burst into tears.

It was not dignified, and she knew it, and despised herself; but her nerves were too delicately strung for calmness. She felt herself insulted, he had taken a great liberty, and she was very, very angry. There was something beside anger in her heart, but she hardly knew that yet.

Her tears had the effect of reducing Frank to despair.

"Oh, what a brute I am!" he cried, penitently. "Forgive me! Forgive me! I never meant to vex you—I could not help it. Don't think ill of me for it: I didn't mean it as disrespect, if you thought that——"

"Yes," said Alys, with a gasp, "I did."

"It was not—I assure you it was not. I must have been mad for the moment, but it was so near me, and everything about you, even anything you have touched, is dear to me. Dear and sacred too! because I love you with my whole heart, and—Alys, can you not love me a little too?"

The pleading would have sounded boyish, but for the fervour of his voice. Alys did not answer, but she began to relent. Her back was almost turned to him, and the tears were still wet on her cheeks, but the sobs that had frightened him had ceased, and her hands were folded before her in her lap.

"Will you not forgive me?" said Frank, quite piteously, at last.

"It was very wrong. I never gave you leave," said Alys, tremulously.

"Would you not give me leave *now*?"

She started and faltered.

"I love you, Alys," he repeated. "Can you not love me? Can you not forgive me?"

She yielded then. She moved her hand towards his, and let him take it, as she replied—

"I might forgive, but——"

"Ah, don't go on!"

She looked round at him uncertainly.

"You were going to say you could not love me."

"Was I?"—the corners of her lips relaxed into a smile.

"Were you not? were you not? Darling, can you care for me a little?" And then she let him put his arm quite around her, and for a moment their lips met.

They were two silly young people, and acted, no doubt, very imprudently; but life was beautiful to them, and each thought love the most beautiful thing on earth. Also, they found it a joyous thing; not knowing how sad it can sometimes be, nor how tragically barren of result.

Frank's heart had been caught in the rebound. Lisbeth's words had hurt him more than he cared to own—they had effectually prevented him from making any further effort to win her love. He had resolved to show her that he was not the poor thing she thought him; and for that reason, chiefly, he had obtained a prospect of work in London. Pique, rather than love, brought him to Quest again: he wanted to be sure that she knew what he was going to do—"for her sake," as he said to himself; but pique was the best possible preparation for a perfectly new kind of development. The delicate, flower-like beauty of Alys Lorimer took him by storm. She was as different from Lisbeth as light from darkness—perhaps that was the reason why he fell in love with her so soon. But *this* was the real love, he told himself—the other had been a brother's affection for a sister; and how lucky it was that Lisbeth had found it out! She had been right and wise all along—he acknowledged it most gratefully; and he should always love her as a sister, when Alys was his wife.

The lovers thought themselves far beyond the reach of any observant eye; but—unfortunately, perhaps—they were mistaken. Just as they kissed each other for that first time, a woman's figure came into view behind them: they did not see her, but she saw them clearly, and saw the kiss. She stopped short, and looked—looked keenly and steadfastly, as if she could not quite believe her eyes. Then her face was covered by a hot flush, which subsided only to leave her very wan and pale. She had been going to approach them, but now she moved softly away over the short grass, until she found a track further down the hillside, which led towards

the Gap; and she passed quietly down this track until she was out of sight.

Lisbeth had been away on the hills, in order to visit a lonely cottage where an old pensioner of hers was living, and she had arranged with Alys to meet her at the Tarn. Frank Moor had joined Alys as she went slowly up the hill; she did not mind a long walk if she might walk slowly, and he gave her the help of his arm as well as the benefit of his company. Then he had seated himself beside her to await Lisbeth's arrival. They did not guess that Lisbeth, with her faithful follower, Zadock, had seen them, and passed them unseen.

As soon as Lisbeth thought herself well out of their reach, she became aware that she was feeling very tired and rather sick. She did not at first connect these sensations with the sight which she had seen: indeed, she wondered a little, in an odd apathetic way, whether she had not walked too far, or had a sunstroke—then she found that she was crying—that two great tears had fallen on her lap, and a sob was rising in her throat; and *then* she knew.

What was it that she discovered at that moment—a moment which she always looked back to as one of the most pregnantly painful moments of her life? She discovered that her whole heart and soul were bound up in the love of one man, and that was the very man whom she had just seen offering his devotion to another.

She had known before this that she loved Francis Moor. But she thought that her love for him was of that protecting, motherly kind which would be satisfied with the promotion of his welfare; that she could be happy in his happiness. And, behold, she was not: he was—possibly—happy, and she was very, very miserable. It seemed to her that love and faith had died out of the world, and that a black veil overspread the sun.

She was too unhappy to dry her tears; they splashed slowly, one after another, upon her pale cotton gown. She was even regardless of the wondering gaze of Zadock, who had drawn near, and was staring at her remorselessly, with

a separate observation for every down-dropping tear. He drew nearer to her, so near at last that he almost touched her; and then said—

"Is it for *them*?"

Lisbeth choked back her tears, and tried to laugh. But Zadock's questions always required an answer.

"For them? Who, Zadock?"

"Them—up there," he said, pointing with his stick to the eminence which they had left. "They—they make you cry——"

"No, no, Zadock; be a good boy: it's not their fault," said Lisbeth; yet, somehow, the simple solicitude of her tone made her eyes gush out with tears again. Zadock's brows gathered into a frown.

"If they hurt Lisbeth," he said, brandishing his big stick, "Zadock kill them."

"Hush! nonsense, Zadock; you are not to talk in that way. They are good—good, remember that; and you are not to hurt them."

"If they make Lisbeth cry," he said, sullenly, "Zadock make them cry, too."

For an instant a curious fear awoke in Lisbeth's breast. A doctor had once told her that it was possible for Zadock to develop strange, murderous instincts, and that, if so, it would be incumbent upon her to put him under restraint. She had rejected the idea with scorn and horror at the time. Zadock, so gentle and affectionate, so fond of the fresh air and of the mountain side, to be capable of violence and immured in a lunatic asylum! It was not to be thought of for a moment—and yet, in spite of herself, she thought of it now. The remembrance left a touch of sternness in her tone.

"Zadock is not good," she said. "If Zadock talks in that way, Lisbeth will be very angry. And see—Lisbeth is not crying now."

She smiled as brightly as she knew how, and Zadock smiled responsively. But a moment later, he looked into her eyes, and still saw the liquid gleam of tears.

"Zadock kill them if you cry," he said, obstinately.

"Then Lisbeth won't cry," said the mistress of Quest, in her most decided tone. "Now, give me your hand, Zadock, and let us run down this hill. We shall get home before them."

And although her heart was so heavy that her hands were like lead, she took his hand and raced him down the hill, knowing that brisk exercise was often the best way of exorcising the evil spirit in Zadock's breast. When they reached the Gap, his face was radiant and content. And for his sake Lisbeth did her utmost to banish any signs of sorrow from her face.

Not for his sake only. It seemed to her that she would rather die than let Frank suspect that she had shed tears for love of him. He did not know that she loved him: he should never know—in this world. Lisbeth believed that in another far-off country, the bourn from which no traveller returns, she would be able to tell him of her love without fear and without shame. In heaven, yes; but not in this troublesome, transitory world.

The lovers waited on the hill, expecting Lisbeth to join them, until the sunset hues began to show themselves in the west. Then, much wondering, and rather inclined to resent Lisbeth's non-appearance (although too blissful to mind it very much), they made the best of their way down to Quest, walking hand in hand until they came within sight of the house. Then, however, they dropped hands, and walked demurely side by side, for Frank had made up his mind to say nothing at present, and Alys was too happy in her girlish dreams to think of confidences.

Certainly it would have been a little hard for Frank to confront Lisbeth quite steadily and tell her that he had transferred his affections to Alys Lorimer. He was ashamed of himself; and yet he said, doggedly, that he could not help it. Alys was a fitting mate for him, and Lisbeth was not—that was the long and short of the matter. He took leave of her at the gate, denying himself the indulgence of another kiss, and only pressing her hands tenderly, and

gazing for a moment into the blue depths of her eyes. He had no suspicion that there were any watchers. But Lisbeth was looking at him through a muslin blind, and Zadock was peering suspiciously from the shelter of an outhouse in the yard.

"Oh, Lisbeth, I am so happy!" Alys breathed, as she flung herself on her sister's neck, and hid her face.

"Are you, love? That is right—quite right."

But Lisbeth did not ask what made her happy, and Alys had been cautioned not to tell.

As Frank passed through the yard, by which he chose to take his way, he caught a glimpse of Zadock's face at the door of the shed. He turned and looked again, for he had not often seen it marked with that expression of scowling defiance and mistrust. Surely that look was never meant for *him!* He turned back impulsively to ascertain.

"Hallo, Zadock! How are you getting on? What are you doing?"

Zadock came out of his shed, with a big knife in his hand, which gleamed ominously in the twilight.

"Making knife sharp," he said. "Zadock kill—kill—*kill* you, if you make Lisbeth cry."

"Who wants to make her cry?" said Frank, laughing. But he felt a little uncomfortable as he strode away down the hill.

CHAPTER XIV.

"LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP!"

Edmund Creighton and his sister Julian arrived when August was half over. Alys was glad to see them, but not so glad as she would have been at the beginning of July. Now, it must be confessed that she found them slightly in the way.

Frank had found many excuses for his visits to Quest. He had to invent excuses, because Lisbeth did not welcome

him as she used to do. Her face looked hard and set when he came to the house: she would not always shake hands with him: she used to stand when he came into a room until he was obliged to go away. And Frank dared not protest. His conscience towards her was not free; and he did not like to ask her what this change of manner meant. At last, even Alys remonstrated.

"Why are you so disagreeable to Mr. Moor when he comes, Lisbeth? You used to like him, and now you are quite cold and silent."

"Am I disagreeable—and cold?" said Lisbeth. "I did not know; but—I think Mr. Moor would do better not to come here so often, and perhaps I wanted to tell him so."

"It would be better to tell him in words rather than by putting on a stiff manner that makes everybody uncomfortable," said Alys, with a gleam in her blue eyes. "I am sure Mr. Moor feels it."

She looked down at the embroidery in her hands, and put in a few stitches. Lisbeth regarded her wistfully. There was something pathetic in the way her dark eyes rested on the girl. Lisbeth's eyes were not quite so bright as they used to be: they were heavy, yet soft, with a lingering tenderness in their expression. They looked like the eyes of one who shed a good many tears when other people were in bed.

"Mr. Moor!" Why did Alys call him Mr. Moor to her? It must be hypocrisy. She would not call him so in private! Why did she not tell her the truth? Did Frank think that she—*she*, Elizabeth Verrall—would mind? It was a humiliating idea.

"I have reason to believe, Alys," she said, at last, "that Lady Adela Moor dislikes his coming to Quest so much. She thinks we are not fit company for him. At least, you may be; but I'm not." She concluded with a bitter smile.

"Not fit company for Frank Moor?" said Alys, dropping the title in her astonishment. "But—how extraordinary! Of course he is handsome—and nice—and all that sort of thing, but how is he better than other young men?"

Lisbeth was delighted; she thought this speech meant that Alys was inclined to depreciate Frank, but Alys was only using a little of the diplomacy which she had learned in a more sophisticated world. She did not want to deceive Lisbeth; she was restless at the thought of keeping a secret from her; but Frank had told her not to betray him, and she was obedient to his slightest wish.

She said no more, and Lisbeth felt that her remark had done no good, and wondered whether she ought to go to Lady Adela and tell her the whole story. Yet—what had she to tell? She had seen Frank kissing Alys—that was all. Perhaps it was nothing more. Perhaps Frank—she spoke evil of him to herself now—was in the habit of making love to every girl he came across. But if so, poor Alys! for Alys was not a girl who would give kisses as a matter of course. Lisbeth was silently miserable, and knew not what to do.

She was delighted to see the Creightons. She grasped in five minutes the reason why Edmund had come. She saw that he wanted Alys by the way in which his cool grey eye softened as he looked at her. And she would speed that wooing by every device in her power. Only Alys, like a wilful girl, seemed to shrink from the young barrister, and devoted herself to Julian.

All was sunshine for the next few days. Frank stayed away; and Alys, knowing his intention of doing so, was happy with her friends. Edmund did not make love hastily. He had resolved to ask her formally to be his wife, and had not much doubt of the answer. But in the meantime he meant everything to be very pleasant, and behaved like a brother or a friend—he knew the subtle charm of that relationship. He did not force himself even on the girls' company; he went shooting sometimes with friends who were staying in the neighbourhood, and hoped that Alys would feel his absence and be glad to see him back. But he did not reckon on the fact that after the first few days Frank Moor reappeared upon the scene, and took to meeting Alys and Julian in their walks, as he was no longer made wel-

come at Quest. Lisbeth stayed at home and ate her own heart; but she did not know of these meetings on the moor or by the lonely Tarn.

Not that Alys meant to keep them secret. She had merely said to Julian, "Lisbeth does not like Mr. Moor, so he does not care to come to the house;" and Julian drew her own conclusions. She was a quick, clever little girl, and scented a romance.

Of course, Alys did not want her to mention these meetings; and, with a mistaken instinct of friendliness, she held her tongue.

But she was lonely sometimes, when those two were talking; and she indulged in little rambles and excursions of her own, so as to leave them free. She stayed within call, and usually within sight; but she amused herself in her own way.

One day, when Frank and Alys were sitting beside the tarn, she went round to the lower end of the pool, and began to explore the little thicket of rowan trees and birch trees that grew beside it. She lost sight of the couple on the hill, but that, she decided, did not matter; they knew where she was, and she could hear them if she called. But she did not bargain for an adventure, such as she never had before.

She was wandering along, not looking where she was going, after her usual fashion, when she heard a voice that startled her by saying sharply—"Take care!"

The warning, perhaps, brought about the disaster. Julian looked down, found herself on the very edge of a bit of broken ground where she must either recoil or jump to a lower level. She jumped—perhaps it would be better to say that she stumbled, and only saved herself from a bad fall by catching at the stem of a rowan tree. But she had not looked before she leapt, and the consequence was that she jumped straight into the middle of a water-colour drawing stretched on a frame, which had been laid on the ground—probably to dry. The ruin was obvious and complete. The sketch was a wreck of torn paper sticking at intervals to a frame.

"Oh, what have I done?" said Julian, involuntarily.

"Great mischief," was the answer that reached her ears. "May I suggest that another time you look before you leap?"

Julian's face was crimson. She did not know it, but she looked extremely pretty as she raised her hazel eyes timidly to see the speaker. Her wild brown hair was blown across her frank forehead; her handsome well-set head was bare, for she carried her straw hat in one hand. Her blue linen frock was plain and short; she wore no gloves, and looked about fifteen.

The man who spoke to her was justified in treating her as quite a little girl—although, as he said to himself, a tremendously pretty one.

The artist, as Julian called him in her mind, was a man of middle age. Perhaps he looked older than he was, or perhaps Julian was a poor judge. At any rate, she set him down vaguely as about "fifty or sixty"; his real age being thirty-seven. He had a "kind face," she thought, not a handsome one; and the pair of brown eyes under the bushy eyebrows twinkled rather humorously as he looked at her. He was tall, lank, and lean: his hair and beard straggled a little, and his coat was undeniably shabby: but he had the charm of manner that marks some men, and it was unmistakably the manner of a gentleman. His features were refined and clearly cut; his voice was very pleasant. Julian did not see half these things—she was far too much of a child; but she felt them, nevertheless.

She had landed on a little triangular cove or hollow in the moss-grown bank: two or three square yards of grassy ground, laved by the waters of the stream which issued from the tarn, and shaded by the trees which grew on the sloping bank above it. The steep broken ground which half enclosed this triangle of smooth grass, and down which she had almost fallen, was partly covered with rare ferns, and Julian felt almost as if she had intruded on the artist's private apartment—so secluded was the spot, so fairy-like in its lovely remoteness from the rest of the world. It was not so

very remote, after all: she could see the figures of Frank and Alys at some distance from her on the other side of the tarn. The sight gave her courage to stammer out—

"I beg your pardon."

The stranger had risen, and was surveying her with amused and friendly eyes.

"It does not in the least matter," he said. "I had done almost nothing to that sketch. You have practically only spoilt a piece of paper."

"But you had begun it—there was something done. Oh, I am so sorry!"

"Pray, don't distress yourself," said the artist, smiling. "It was a very bad sketch, to begin with, and I was thinking of beginning another. I am glad you have obliged me to make the attempt."

"But it is so tiresome to have anything spoilt—anything one has begun," said Julian, finding her natural voice. "I know it myself——"

"Why? Do you sketch too?" he said, kindly.

"No: I am not clever at anything ornamental—oh, I ought not to have said that, ought I? I am always saying the wrong thing."

"What have you said wrong, then? I did not notice."

"I mean," said Julian, turning crimson again, "that if it is your life-work, you cannot like it to be spoken of as merely ornamental."

The stranger was silent for a moment or two, moving the broken frame with his foot, and looking curiously grave. Then he looked up, and met the glance of Julian's bright, brave eyes.

"You are right," he said. "One never likes to hear one's life-work belittled. But how did you grow so wise? Many people, far older than you, do not know the truth of what you say."

"I know some of them do not," said Julian, rather anxiously; "but then I always thought them stupid."

He laughed out at that. "It is sometimes said that most people are stupid."

"Oh, I hope not—I *hope* not," said the girl, with fervour. "It would be dreadful to go out into the world and meet nothing but stupid people who don't understand you. It is bad enough as it is when one is only a—a child; but I have always thought it would be nicer when I was old enough to choose my friends for myself."

Looking at her bright original face, the stranger reflected that this young lady was not like other girls, and would probably in the years to come attract to herself all that was brightest and best in the society in which she moved. His curiosity was stirred, although it was usually a difficult matter to stir it. Where did she come from; this girl, who was not like other girls?

"Do you live here?" he asked, rather abruptly. (She was only a child: it was not rude to question her.)

"Oh, no, I come from London. I am staying at Quest—the farmhouse by the Gap, do you know it?—with friends. My brother is with me too. Edmund Creighton; do you know him?"

"Yes," said the artist, unexpectedly. "I know him—slightly. So you are Miss Creighton."

"No, indeed!" said Julian, laughing merrily. "I have some elder sisters who are the Miss Creightons——"

("The stupid people, I suppose," said the stranger to himself.)

"And I'm only Julian. Nobody calls me anything else. I am in the schoolroom still, and shall be there plenty of time longer, I fancy."

"You will be coming out before long?"

"Not for two or three years, probably," said the girl, thereby confirming the stranger in the belief in her youth. "Mamma says she does not want three daughters to chaperone, you see. But where did you know Edmund? Do you come to our house?"

The artist smiled. "I don't think I have ever been to your house. I have been very often to your father's office. And I am now staying at Sir Richard Leycester's place, where your brother goes to shoot sometimes.

I don't suppose he will remember me: we were not introduced."

"I was hoping you were a friend of his," said Julian, with such a downcast countenance that the man laughed aloud.

"Take my word for it," he said, "that your brother will not object to your knowing me. I am quite respectable." At which Julian blushed furiously. "And Miss Verrall of Quest would answer for me, if you asked her." There was a look of humorous amusement on his face, which gave Julian offence.

"I shall not ask them," she said, trying to be stately, and glancing round for a way of retreat. "If you are staying at Sir Richard Leycester's, it is a long way off, and we are not likely to meet again."

"Quite true," said her new friend. "But my name is John l'Estrange. You might like to tell them that you had met me."

There was a certain dignity in his manner that quelled Julian's hasty wrath. She examined him furtively from under the brim of the straw hat which she had now placed on her head, and decided that although his velvet coat and slouch hat were too picturesque to be quite correct, he was, nevertheless, a gentleman, and a person to be trusted. She was not usually mistaken in her intuition. And certainly she was not mistaken in this case.

"You are a good way from Quest," said Mr. l'Estrange, kindly. "Did you come here quite alone?"

"No. My friend, Miss Lorimer, brought me," Julian answered, more primly than usual. "She is on the other side—you can see her if you look round."

"I see. She is talking to some one."

"Yes, Mr. Moor of Moor End. Do you know him, too? He met us—he often meets us, and goes for a walk with us."

"Francis Moor of Moor End?" said the stranger. It seemed to Julian as if he raised his eyebrows for a moment.

"Yes; do you know him, then?"

"Hardly. I have had some correspondence with him, and I hope to know him better by and by."

"I suppose you meet a great many people in the way of your profession? People who are interested in art—people who buy pictures, I mean," she added, bluntly, seeing that he looked oddly at sea when she asked her first question.

"Oh, yes," he said, laughing quietly, as if amused at his own want of comprehension. "I do meet a good many people. But I must not figure under false pretences as an artist: I am not an artist by profession."

"*Are* you not?" cried Julian. "Oh, I am so sorry. I thought you must be, and that painting was your life-work. But what *is* your life-work?"

He was leaning against the steep bank, and for a moment or two his eyes were very grave. He answered soberly enough: "Upon my word, I don't know."

"But what *are* you? What is your profession?"

"I am afraid I am a sort of Jack-of-all-trades, Miss Julian. I was once a barrister, and I have done a little literary work; and a little scientific work; and I paint, as you see."

"Is that all?" said Julian. There was such honest disappointment in her face, that l'Estrange turned to her with a smile.

"Why, what else do you want? What did you expect?"

"I don't know. I only thought that you looked like a man that *did* something. And that is the only sort of man I like," announced Julian, stubbornly.

The man's mouth twitched. "But my difficulty is, that I do too many things—not that I do nothing."

"Jack-of-all-trades—master of none," said Julian.

"That's quite true," he said, looking at her kindly. "You have got very good and right ideas, wherever you may have learnt them. If you carry them out in your own life, you will be a noble and useful woman."

The wind was taken out of Julian's sails by this address. She suddenly realised that she was only a young girl, a

mere child, by the side of this man, with his kind, stately benevolence of bearing, whom she had been trying with girlish ignorance to teach and patronise. She turned very red, and said nothing more.

Seeing her embarrassment, he gently directed her attention to some rude steps cut in the bank, helped her up them, and handed her across the stepping-stones by which she had crossed the narrow stream. She thanked him abruptly, and fled back to Alys and Frank, who were not very grateful to her for interrupting their colloquy. However, the trio turned back to Quest together, and John l'Estrange betook himself to his sketching materials again.

CHAPTER XV.

JULIAN'S WISH.

If Alys had been less preoccupied, Julian would at once have poured into her ears the history of her morning's adventure. But Miss Lorimer's attention was just then entirely absorbed by Frank Moor; and by the time Quest was reached, Julian, lingering behind the couple for most of the way, had resolved to say nothing about it. Even Edmund was always reproaching her for clumsiness, although not so harshly and bitterly as they did at home; and for once Julian acknowledged that they had cause. To confess that she jumped straight into somebody's sketch—("and it is a wonder I didn't jump straight on the man himself!" thought Julian, remorsefully)—would be too humiliating. Only—if Mr. l'Estrange knew Edmund and her father, might he not mention the matter to them, by way of a merry jest? And that would be worse than anything.

"I don't believe he would!" said the child to herself, with burning cheeks. "He would know that I should be laughed at, and I think he would understand! He seemed so kind—I don't believe he would ever say a word."

And she was right. John l'Estrange had no intention of mentioning Julian's unlucky jump to anybody. He was as sensitive as a woman where anybody's feelings were concerned.

But Julian thought, a day or two later, that she had made a mistake.

For Edmund came home from his shooting, and accosted her, with a look of great amusement.

"So you have been making acquaintances on the hillside, I hear."

"Who told you that?" said Julian, firing up.

"The acquaintance himself, I suppose," returned Edmund, provokingly. "Well, he's a very good fellow; and it doesn't matter if you talk to *him;* but I wouldn't advise you to chatter to every man you meet who happens to be sketching at the tarn. It's a favourite place for artists."

He walked away, not troubling himself further; for Julian was to him, as to all her family, the merest child, and he was not really ungratified by the words which he had heard spoken of her that day; but he left his sister stifling with rage and shame and indignation. "So that was what Mr. l'Estrange had thought of her! He had evidently given Edmund the impression that she had entered into conversation with him of her own accord—like a nasty, forward, flirting sort of girl! He had no doubt told the story of the spoiled sketch, although Edmund did not allude to it. Edmund would probably tease her about it just when she did not want to be teased—at dinner, perhaps, or at breakfast when she got home! She hated Mr. l'Estrange, and would never speak to anybody again who had not been properly introduced to her in a drawing-room. Perhaps mamma is right after all, and I am nothing but a vulgar tomboy," said Julian, ruefully surveying herself in the small looking-glass which Lisbeth had provided for her use.

It was a very pretty tomboy that she saw. Her short curls, her low, broad brow, her hazel eyes, and mutinous red mouth, were full of life and beauty. She only saw the unlikeness to other girls of her acquaintance, and did not know

that this unlikeness constituted her greatest charm. She made a grimace at herself in the glass, and then was surprised to see that the hazel eyes were full of tears. She was weeping over her lost ideal of John l'Estrange.

"I thought him so kind—so nice," she was saying to herself. "And now he is no nicer than other people, and I suppose he did not forgive me for spoiling his sketch, although he pretended that he did. I'll never speak to him again."

It was easy to make this resolution: easy to stay close to the house or at Alys's side for a day or two: not so easy to keep it when she came face to face with Mr. l'Estrange one day in the public road that wound up the hill from Crosthwaite town. She went so far as to give him a stiff little nod and try to pass him by; but the man actually stopped short, and smiled, and held out his hand.

"How are you, Miss Creighton? I met your brother the other day, and asked after you. Don't you think that we may consider ourselves old acquaintances after that?"

"Somebody has been talking nonsense to the child, and putting silly notions in her head," he reflected, looking steadily at Julian's encardined cheeks and shamed, averted eyes. "Well, I won't have it: that is all. She shall tell me what's the matter."

"Have I offended you?" he asked, very gently, as she allowed him to take her little hot ungloved hand in his.

"I don't know—at least—I may as well tell you, Mr. l'Estrange——"

Why did he suddenly look so astonished? He opened his lips as if to intercept her, but no sound came. The astonishment was gradually obliterated by the flicker of a queer, reluctant smile.

"Of course I don't mind what any one tells my brother about me—only I did think you would understand what brothers are like, and that you would not say how stupid I had been! Edmund will never let me forget it as long as I live; and I had so much rather you had scolded me at the time than told him——"

"Told him that I had talked to you for five minutes? But there was no harm in that," said the man, astonishment again predominant in his face.

"I don't mean that in the least: I mean about the sketch, and my spoiling it," said Julian, almost in tears. Then, trying hard to be dignified: "It does not matter, of course; but when brothers tease a girl so dreadfully about being awkward and uncivilised——"

"Does your brother tease you in that way?" said Mr. l'Estrange, the smile coming uppermost. "But I assure you it is not my fault if he does. What did he say? Because I never mentioned the sketch to him."

"You—did—not mention—the sketch?"

"No. Did he?"

"Well—no," said Julian, after a long pause; "I can't say he did. But I have been expecting him to talk about it ever since; I am sure he means to, because he looked so amused and so *funny* when he spoke of you, and he advised me not to chatter to everybody I met on a hillside—so I thought he knew."

"Did he advise you not to chatter to me?"

"No," said the girl, quite frankly; "he said I might talk to you—you were a good fellow, or something of that kind. Oh!—oughtn't I to have told you? Are you vexed?"—for there was something inexplicable to her on her new friend's face.

"On the contrary, I am gratified at hearing Mr. Edmund Creighton's unbiassed opinion of my merits," said the man, with a laugh. "Well, you may talk to me—and I am a good fellow—nothing more?"

"He said nothing more to me."

"Not even——"

He stepped suddenly, and looked at the girl's bright face.

"He said nothing about the sketch, indeed, Mr. l'Estrange," said Julian, eagerly. "It was all my imagination. I fancied he knew, and I was afraid of being teased, so I only spoke of you that once. I thought it rather unkind

of you to have given him such a handle against me, you know."

"But, indeed, I did not," said Mr. l'Estrange, and his voice sounded unusually soft and kindly. "I only mentioned that I met you and talked for a few minutes with you—rather as making a sort of introduction for myself than anything else. As your brother does not object, I think you might as well give me the pleasure of coming to look at another little sketch I am making—it is close by."

"I won't hurt it this time," said Julian, smiling. "But, if you are sketching, why are you on the high-road?"

"Because I saw you from a distance, and hurried down to the road to waylay you. I thought your advice on my sketch would be valuable."

They laughed like a pair of children, diverse as their ages were; and then Mr. l'Estrange showed her a stile and a foot-path by which he had come from a certain coign of vantage on the hillside. He was sketching Quest from this point, and had already made a very pretty study of the old grey house.

Julian made no difficulty about staying with her new friend. He had found a clump of trees near the stream, and was comfortably ensconced in the shade, with easel, camp-stool, white umbrella, all complete. He wanted her to take the stool, but she preferred the dry fragrant grass with a rug spread over it; and here she sat and watched him, while he, at her desire, went on with his work. He painted skilfully, she could see that; and she wondered much why he had not adopted art as a profession.

"You must be very strong," she said at length, after a pause.

"I am pretty strong. But why?"

"You have so many things to carry. Camp-stool, easel, paint-box, and *things*, rug, luncheon-basket, I declare. You must look like the knight in the Looking-glass book, if you carry all these at once."

"I am luxurious: I don't carry them at all. My man brought them, and will come back for them by and by."

"You are rich, then," said Julian, meditating.

"Why? It is not a ruinous expense to have one's traps carried to a place and brought back again, is it?"

"No; but you said '*my* man.' That means your servant, don't it? Even Edmund has not 'a man' of his own."

"Perhaps he will have one some day. We bachelors are very self-indulgent fellows," said Mr. l'Estrange, lightly. "There is no telling what we won't do to save ourselves trouble. I am very lazy: I like to be waited upon."

"All men do, I think," said Julian, wisely. "Oh, how I wish I were rich!"

Mr. l'Estrange had just begun to put a wash of colour over his sky. For some reason he stopped in the middle, and let his brush make an ugly blur. He could not get it out afterwards, and it spoiled the picture. Perhaps that was the reason why he frowned so deeply when he spoke.

"Why should *you* wish to be rich?" he said, in a vexed tone.

"If I were rich," said Julian, her eyes dilating and her cheek beginning to glow, "I should never live in London any more. I should go away and live among real things."

"Real things? Aren't houses and people real enough for you?"

"No; I mean things that grow out of the earth: trees, and grass, and flowers. I would not go to parties and dance till five in the morning. If I danced at all, I would dance in the afternoon. And I would build houses in the country where poor people's children, who were ill and hungry, you know, should come and stay; and we would all say, 'Ugh, you ugly, smoky, grimy old London, we hate you, and we wish you didn't exist!'"

Mr. l'Estrange's brow had cleared. He broke into a laugh. "Have you been reading Ruskin, child?" he asked.

"No. Does he say anything like that? I always think that that is what I should like to do if I were rich."

"Perhaps you will be rich some day."

"Never. There's nobody to leave me any money," said

Julian, blithely: "and as I can't be rich, I am only sorry that I can't be really poor."

"You are an enigmatical young person," said l'Estrange, "and I never met any girl quite like you. Why should you wish to be really poor?"

"It's again because I like real things. I don't want to have to think about my dress, and how I can pretend that last summer's frock is a new one or that I have three hats instead of two. I don't like to go to Scarborough for three days and pretend I was there for weeks. I don't like having big dinner parties and skimping for a month afterwards. I don't mean that we do these things," said Julian, turning red, "but many people do, and I don't want to be one of them."

"You have seen more of the seamy side of life than I thought," said Mr. l'Estrange. He had put down his brushes, and was listening attentively.

"I have eyes and ears," said the girl, brusquely. "How can one help seeing and hearing?"

"But what would you like to be if you *were* really poor?"

"I should like to be a cottage-woman, with bread to make and dishes to wash, and little children to mind," said Julian. "That would be the nicest thing in all the world, I think. But I can't be that—and the worst is that I can't hope to be allowed to take a degree and become a High School teacher!"

"Well, you have a remarkable variety of ambitions," said Mr. l'Estrange, "and quite incompatible ones, apparently. I wish I could gratify any of them for you, but I don't quite see how I can!"

"No, I should think not!" and Julian laughed at the idea.

"Except one," said her friend, very deliberately.

"One! You could gratify one! What do you mean, Mr. l'Estrange?"

He laughed, and went on painting.

"I suppose you mean that you could persuade papa and mamma to send me to Girton," said she, pensively; "but I assure you that you are mistaken. They don't wish me to

go. They say they don't like the effect of so much education on women. You are quite wrong: you couldn't get them to let me be a teacher."

"Perhaps I *was* wrong," he said. "There's no other way, is there?"

"Oh no," said Julian, wonderingly.

Then there was a silence, during which she looked at the landscape, and he painted vigorously, but without much regard for the effect of his dashes of colour.

"Julian," he said at last, "I may call you Julian, may I not? You must remember this: that our best wishes sometimes disappoint us most keenly. Even if you never have what you think you want most, don't be disappointed or soured, as if life had cheated you. Things always come to an end at last, and you see that what you have had has been the best for you."

His words were meant to be cheering, but they sounded as if they dropped from the lips of a man who knew what disappointment meant. Julian looked at him gravely.

"I do not like that view," she said. "I would rather say that things *mended*, not *ended*, and that you are going to get what is best for you by and by, if you don't get it now."

"There is a good deal of truth in that," he said, laying down his brushes again. "Julian, you are wonderfully wise for your age—what is your age, by the by, if I may ask?"

"I am seventeen."

"Seventeen?" He turned upon her sharply. "You are joking—you mean fifteen?"

"No, indeed. I was seventeen last birthday. Why not?"

"You seemed such a child," he said, looking at her.

"That's because of my short hair and short frocks. Next year I am to let my hair grow, and have my dresses longer."

"And then you will come out and be a modern young lady!"

"I can't help myself," said Julian, almost bitterly.

"No, poor child! It is a great pity," said Mr. l'Estrange, relapsing into a grave mood, and staring straight before

him. He sat silent so long that Julian at last found it dull, and rose from her lowly seat upon the rug, saying that she must go. He did not try to detain her. He shook hands, and lifted his hat very ceremoniously, and stood for some little time after she had turned into the pathway that led across the hill to Quest. Then he seated himself again, and began to meditate.

"Seventeen! I never dreamt it. What a pity it will be to see that fine young nature deteriorating to the level of the poor creatures amongst whom she lives! It will deteriorate: there is no doubt of that.

"I suppose I might prevent it if I chose," he went on, with an odd smile. "I might, as I said, give her one of her wishes—she would promise anything just now. No, it would not be fair. She must see the world for herself. She is only seventeen, and I have lived twenty years longer than she has done. It would be taking an unfair advantage of her youth, and she would have the right to reproach me afterwards. Poor little girl! I hope I shall hear about her from time to time."

He sighed, shook his head, and looked critically at his work. He had spoilt it: there was no doubt of that. Presently he put up his sketching materials, and threw himself down on the rug for a quiet smoke. But every now and then an irresistible smile curled his lips, and he took his pipe out of his mouth, to say, half aloud—

"Would they say I was mad if I gave Julian her wish?"

CHAPTER XVI.

LOVE OR LIFE?

MATTERS were in an unsatisfactory state at Quest. Lisbeth was unhappy, and therefore a trifle more strict with herself and everybody else—except Alys—than usual; Alys was preoccupied; and Edmund Creighton was piqued.

Julian only was merry and bright as usual, but she was not much to the fore, for Mr. l'Estrange had offered to give her sketching lessons, and she seemed a good deal absorbed in the manipulation of her water-colours.

Edmund had relinquished his shooting expeditions with the Leycester party. He said that he had only two or three days longer to stay, and that he meant to devote them to Alys and his sister. He had taken up his quarters at the hotel in Crosthwaite, where he could be more at ease than at Quest; but he came to Quest every day, much to Frank Moor's dissatisfaction.

"Why does that fellow come here so constantly?" he asked of Alys; and Alys answered, with a faint increase of colour in her cheeks—

"His sister is here. And he is an old friend of mine—we have known each other ever since we were children."

While Edmund in his turn observed—

"Moor of Moor End, as the good people call him, hangs about Quest a good deal, apparently. Is he a friend of Miss Verrall's, or of yours?"

"Oh, of both, I think," said Alys, with a much brighter colour in her face than when she had spoken of Edmund to Frank.

"An idle, sentimental sort of fellow, I should think," said the young lawyer, drily. "Looks like a troubadour."

"He is very handsome," said Alys, greatly indignant.

"Handsome? Hm, yes. Rather Byronic. The type is obsolete, rather, don't you think? When he has knocked about the world, and been Raynflete's secretary for a year or two, he will lose that air of subdued melancholy which women call 'interesting.'"

Alys did not reply, but looked so much vexed and hurt that Edmund saw fit to soften down his opinions a little.

"He is rather like a Vandyke portrait at present, and that is a distinct offence to us plainer men," he said, smiling. And Alys laughed out, as one who was pleased by a frank acknowledgment of jealousy.

The quaint, pretty garden at Quest was at its brightest

autumnal glory. The flowers were not so fragrant as in summer; they were deeper hued than those of spring; but the single dahlias and hollyhocks, Japanese anemones and zinnias, had a beauty of their own which compensated for what was lost. Alys had deserted the doorstep in favour of a bench among the blossoming shrubs, where she liked to dream away her time over a book; and it was there that Edmund found her one evening before he went home. It was not by accident that she was alone, for he had spoken a word to Lisbeth, and she had undertaken to keep Julian out of the way.

"I wish you luck, Mr. Creighton," Lisbeth said, looking at him sadly, out of her great sorrowful eyes, "but I am afraid you won't succeed."

"I have never failed yet," he said, quietly, "in anything I have attempted."

"You may have been forestalled."

"No, I have not," he said, with a flicker of light in his cool grey eyes; "I may have been superseded—but I was the first."

"Ah, why did you not make sure before she came away?" cried Lisbeth passionately.

Why did he not? He held down his head and went away. He knew he had been to blame. If he had spoken soon enough, spoken decisively, spoken strongly and warmly, Alys would have promised him her hand.

She was rather a slight thing—this Alys Lorimer: sweet and tender and innocent, but in no way strong: not like Lisbeth, who would always have known whether she loved a man or not, and having made up her mind about it, would love him to the end. It sometimes seemed, even to Alys's lovers and admirers, as if her soul were not quite awake: as if her heart were yet, in a sense, untouched. There were possibilities in her nature of which she herself was not aware. But, such as she was, Edmund Creighton was determined to make her his; and he told himself that he could make her love him, whether she had had a fancy for Francis Moor or not, if once she were his wife.

Full of this thought, he sat down beside her on the bench, and began to talk gently of the beauty of the scene before him, of the darkening violet sky and the stars that glimmered faintly above the hills.

"I am sorry to leave the place," he said.

"Yes. I am sorry you are going. Could you not leave Julian behind?"

"I'm afraid not. Her mother writes that lessons ought to begin before long."

"It has been so nice to have her here."

"What do *you* mean to do, Alys? Shall you stay with your sister all through the winter?"

"I—suppose so."

"It will be very cold for you," said Edmund, watching the changes of colour in her face.

"Yes, but it is healthy. I am ever so much stronger than when I came."

"You look better. But I must confess"—and he shrugged his shoulders—"that I should dread those fierce gusts which will tear down from the hills, and the dreary desolation of snow, which sometimes lies, they tell me, upon the ground till May. It will take a strong constitution to stand it; and yours is not very strong—and you have lived in towns and in warmer countries nearly all your life."

Alys's eyes filled with tears. It seemed to her that Edmund was wantonly cruel. But he went on remorselessly.

"It will be awfully lonely too. Your sister seems to be always busy, and she sees no society. Of course she is not quite of the class to which you are accustomed—she is splendid, admirable, everything that is good, I know; but she is not quite of our world. You can't deny that, surely! Shall you not feel the absence of congenial companionship a good deal?"

She did not reply, and, looking at her, he saw the gleam of a tear upon her cheek. He spoke again, gazing straight into her face, as if quite unconcerned.

"Even your friend Mr. Moor will be away; and—I think Lady Adela has not recognised your existence?"

Alys covered her face with her hands. "Edmund, how unkind you are! I know—it will be terrible; but what can I do?"

"You are right; it will be terrible," said Mr. Edmund Creighton, quietly. "Very especially terrible for you, who have not been accustomed to roughing it. Crosthwaite is lovely in summer, no doubt; but in winter!—I think you should consult a doctor, Alys, if I may say so, as to whether your chest is strong enough to bear the winter's cold."

If he wanted to frighten her, he had succeeded. She looked up with scared wet eye.

"Don't you think I shall be able to bear it, Edmund?"

"It depends on what you call bearing it," he said, gloomily. "Your father always said your lungs were delicate: of course I do not know."

"But there is nothing—nothing else for me to do," said Alys.

"No, I suppose not. Poor little thing! I shall often think of you, Alys, when I am in London, and hear the wind howl round the houses, and see the snow lying white on the streets. Storms don't last long in London, thank Heaven; we shall be well on into spring while you are still imprisoned by drifts, and Quest is shaken to its foundation by the tempest. I shall think of you as a little bird in a cage—shut up, out of the world, a prisoner."

"They say—Mr. Moor says—that winter here is quite lovely," said Alys, in a shaken voice.

"Possibly—for a man! There's plenty of skating, no doubt. I think you will have to make up your mind to stop indoors for three months, Alys."

"Lisbeth does not stay indoors."

"You are not Lisbeth. You have had a different training. She is a hardy mountain annual, and you—poor child!—you are a delicate exotic, just out of your hot-house, and about to be exposed to the rigours of a northern winter. I don't like thinking of it—I don't, indeed!"

"There is nothing else," said Alys again, in an extinguished tone.

She was thinking how true it was, all that he had said; that she would never be able to bear her life at Quest when Francis had gone away, when Julian and Edmund had abandoned her. She loved Lisbeth, but she did not feel the real strength and grandeur of Lisbeth's character. To her Lisbeth was only a protective power—kindly and generous, but unimportant and uncongenial; she was not quite capable of seeing the nobler side.

"There *is* something else," said Edmund, quietly, "if you would accept it."

"No, no," she cried, wishing to silence him; "there is nothing else."

"Listen, Alys. I did not speak definitely enough before you left London; but I thought you understood—I thought I had said enough to let you know. I have hoped for a very long time now that you would let *me* make a home for you—a warm, sheltered nest, where you would be safe from all the winds that blow. Let me speak, dearest: do not interrupt me yet. I love you with all my heart. Perhaps you do not care for me so much as I care for you—perhaps it is in a different way; but you do like me a little, Alys; I am sure you do—isn't that so?"

"Oh, yes—yes—a little," said Alys, tremulously. "More than a little: a great deal—but not——"

"No, I know that: not as much as I care for you," said Edmund, taking for granted that he knew what she was going to say. "But that would come in time. I could make you very happy, Alys. You should have everything you wanted: your nest should be soft as eiderdown. I have waited until I had enough to offer you; I am able now to think of a house of my own, where we could be happy together; and if I was not sufficiently explicit before, I will be so now. I love you, Alys, and I want you to be my wife."

"It cannot be, Edmund."

"Why not, dear? You know I consider that you are really half promised to me. You know I thought so before you left London——"

"Oh, *no*, Edmund!"

"Indeed, I did, and I do not see why you should not keep your promise," said Edmund, purposely exaggerating a little what had passed between them. "Circumstances have changed only on *my* side: on yours, Alys, surely they have not changed?"

She turned her head away and twisted her slender fingers. This claim of his confused and frightened her. She had never thought of herself as bound in any way.

"Listen," he said to her. "I will not mince my words. If you stay here, Alys, for the winter, you will die. You are too frail and weak to support the cold. You will fade away like the hothouse flower that I said you were; and when it is too late you will regret the choice that you have made. You had better come away while there is time. You were not made for these bleak heights and snowy moorlands, little tender child that you are! I will give you back all that has been missing in your life—music, art, colour, warmth—love. Is it not worth something, Alys? And remember that the alternative is death."

His voice sank to an impressive whisper. He was not insincere, for he truly believed that Alys would suffer severely from the cold of the Crosthwaite region; but perhaps he used superlatives a trifle freely. He knew Alys well, and he knew how to work upon her emotions.

"Do you think I shall die?" she asked, with a frightened look at him.

"I think so. I cannot help it—I must say what I think. Alys, my darling, don't expose yourself to such a frightful risk. Let me save you—let me make you happy."

He stole his hand towards her. His eyes burned with a strange light; his face was very pale. But as soon as she felt his fingers upon hers, she recoiled.

"No, no," she said, pushing his hand away. "I can't do it. I can't help it. If I die, I die, and there is an end of it. But I cannot marry you."

"You think so at this moment, but you will not always think so," said Edmund, in his softest voice. "I love you,

but I won't plead for my love. I plead for your own life and happiness. Save yourself, darling. Come away with me: we could be married directly, and you would be out of danger. I cannot bear to leave you behind."

"But you must, Edmund. If I am to die—I can't help it. Perhaps Lisbeth will take me away somewhere. But I cannot love you—I cannot marry you—because—I love some one else."

Her voice was barely audible, and her face was crimsoned with blushes. Edmund drew his hand away, but kept his eyes on her face.

"I suppose," he said, in a changed voice, "that it is Francis Moor."

She would not answer, but he saw her throat quiver, and she put up her hand to hide the trembling of her mouth.

"You need not say anything. I suppose you are keeping it a secret? I can see it all in your face. It *is* Francis Moor? Very well, Alys, I will tell you something else. It is Francis Moor—and it is suicide as well."

She tried to speak, but he restrained her.

"*He* cannot marry you now, and transplant you to the climate in which you could live and flourish. You would not even be better off at Moor End. It is madness, Alys. Let me counsel you as a friend—not as a lover, for one moment. Your wisest course would be to throw over your girlish fancy for Mr. Moor, and marry me at once."

"I could not be so false—to him."

"If he loves you truly, he would advise you to do it. Look here, Alys: it is a choice between life and love. If you choose love—that is Frank Moor, you *die*, as surely as if I stabbed you to the heart; if you marry me, you choose life. Which shall it be?"

"Love," said Alys; and in the starlight he saw that her small white face was transfigured as if by angelic radiance of truth and constancy. "I would rather die here than live to marry you."

He winced, as if she had struck him in the face.

"Do you mean that, Alys?" he asked, in a lower tone.

"I do mean it. I do not want to die—life is too sweet—but I will stay here and be true to Frank, even if it means my death. It is no use tempting me, Edmund; I have made up my mind."

"And I have not unmade mine," said Edmund, calmly, as he rose from his seat. "I believe that some day you will see your mistake, and turn to me for help. I shall always be ready, Alys; and you will long by and by for sunshine and happiness and love."

He felt that he could say no more just then; he had failed where he had been most certain of success, and he was too wise to persevere in a hopeless task. His strength lay in patience: he believed that Alys would ultimately change her mind.

He passed out of the garden into the yard, leaving Alys to cry her heart out on the garden-bench. He had frightened her, but he had not moved her will. She was still true to the man who had won her love.

Edmund came suddenly upon Zadock in the yard. The half-witted man was engaged as he had been when Frank Moor once spoke to him—in polishing a knife. Edmund stopped and spoke to him carelessly.

"Fine knife that, Zadock!"

Zadock grinned horribly. "Knife good. Knife for squoire," he said deliberately.

"What! as a present?"

Zadock shook his head. "Squoire Moor bad man," he replied. "Zadock kill him some day—with knife."

Edmund Creighton's heart gave a strange bound. Was it of joy or fear? He asked himself whether it was his duty to take the knife away.

"Why?" he said briefly. "What for?"

Zadock's eyes gleamed. "He make Lisbeth cry. He kiss *her*—missy. Missy over there;" and his face grew black with anger, as he pointed towards the garden. "He sorry some day."

"I hope he will be," said Edmund drily, and tossed the idiot half-a-crown as he turned away.

He had a curious difficulty in getting rid of the notion that he ought to have taken the knife away.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I WILL REMEMBER."

JULIAN'S eyes were red with weeping, and so was the tip of her nose. It is not becoming to any one to weep violently, but she had hardly arrived at the stage when a girl thinks of what is becoming. Her hair was in a tangled mass, partly hiding her forehead, and her complexion was decidedly patchy. She had never looked less pretty in her life, and she did not care. She was quite alone, sitting on the grassy patch of broken bank beside the narrowing stream below the tarn; and she did not think that any one could see her, or would find her out. But she was mistaken; for some one else had wandered down the borders of the tarn; and he, her friend, Mr. l'Estrange, had soon caught sight of her, and had recognised the fact that she was in a state of woe.

Some men would have recognised it only in order to make their escape unseen; but l'Estrange was not a man of that kind. His heart went out to the child when he saw that she was in trouble, and he wondered what he could do to comfort her. He made a long circuit, so as to approach her cautiously, yet not to come upon her unawares. She should have a chance of escape, if she did not wish to talk to him. Some girls would be glad to run away and hide their reddened eyes.

But Julian, although she must have seen him coming, did not seem inclined to run away. She sat, crouching miserably on the grass with her hands clasped round her knees, and a damp ball of a handkerchief twisted up in one of them. Her eyes were fixed on the running water at her feet, and even when Mr. l'Estrange approached her, she did

not lift them, or show by any movement that she was aware of his presence.

"Shall I disturb you?" he inquired, from between the trees on the bank, whence he could look down on her tousled chestnut head.

"Oh, no! Please come—I *wanted* to see you," said Julian, with passionate emphasis.

He came down, wondering. What was the matter with this little girl whose frankness and innocence had seemed to him so delicious? And would she tell him what was wrong, or would she altogether ignore the facts of reddened eyes and rumpled hair?

Evidently Julian was not disposed to make a secret of her woe. She unclasped her hands and held out one to him in greeting, and he saw that her eyes were once more swimming in sorrowful tears.

"Why, what is the matter?" he said, forgetting that she was anything but a child in trouble.

"Oh, Mr. l'Estrange! We're going away — to-morrow!"

"I am very sorry to hear it," l'Estrange said, holding the little hot hand very kindly, and looking down at her flushed and tear-stained face with honest sympathy. "Is it not very sudden?"

"Yes, indeed. I thought we were to have a fortnight longer; and—Miss Verrall had asked me to stay on with Alys for a time! but mamma has written to say she won't hear of it."

"Does she not like your being here then?"

"Oh, yes, for a time! But she says she sees that I am getting quite out of hand, and shall not be fit for anything when I come back to London."

"What does she mean by that?" said l'Estrange, with an irrepressible smile. He seated himself beside her as he spoke.

"Well, you see," said Julian, rather hesitatingly, "she wants me to get married."

This was a piece of frankness which apparently startled

Mr. l'Estrange. He looked at her sharply, with a curious darkening of his brows, as if some suspicious thought had entered his head; but he said nothing.

"I don't see that it is so necessary: do you?" said Julian, twisting her handkerchief round her fingers. "You were never married, were you?"

"No, child, no." He turned away his head.

"Oughtn't I to have said it? Have I vexed you?" she asked wistfully. "I didn't know that people minded—when —when they were—grown up——"

"When they were *my* age, you meant," he said, turning again towards her, with a kindly smile. "But you know I do not seem so very old to myself. I am thirty-seven. . . . Well, I suppose that does seem old to you. I never married, because the woman I loved when I was little more than a boy, married some one else. That is all. Not very much of a story, is it?"

"And you cared a great deal?" said the girl, softly.

"Yes, I cared a great deal. My God, yes!" He said the last word almost under his breath, and Julian shrank a little involuntarily and felt afraid. Why she put the next question—a question which had a curious effect upon the hearer —she never knew.

"And—do you care *now*?" she said.

To her surprise, l'Estrange rose to his feet and walked a few paces away from her. He stood looking out at the water for some few minutes, with his back turned to the girl, and she remained silent, her own griefs almost forgotten in the consideration of his new and strange emotion. When he came back to her his face was pale, and there was a new expression in his kind eyes.

"I cannot tell you," he said, quietly, "whether I care now —or not."

She put out her hand and pressed his arm gently, by way of showing sympathy. "I hope you don't," she said. "I don't like to think of your being sorry all these years—and of going on to be sorry for years to come—for what can't be helped."

It was quaintly expressed, but the feeling was genuine enough.

"You are right; it is wasted time," said l'Estrange, in a low voice. "Wasted time, wasted affection, wasted emotion; true enough, though nobody has had the courage to tell me so before. Well—perhaps, if I meet you again, I shall be able to tell you that I do not care."

"Shall we ever meet again?" said Julian; and the bright drops started to her eyes again.

"You cannot care, surely, whether we meet again or not?" he asked, with a touch of scepticism—perhaps assumed for the occasion—in his tone.

"Yes, indeed I do. You have been so kind to me. I should often have been very lonely if I had not met you. I thought," said the girl reproachfully, "that you would be sorry too that I was going away."

"Yes, I am sorry."

There was some abruptness in the tone of the reply, which made Julian look at him earnestly. But she could not quite understand either his tone or the look upon his face. His eyebrows were knitted, his eyes fixed absently upon the water; it seemed as if he would not look at her.

"I never met anybody who helped me so much with my sketching," Julian went on, in regretful tones. "And you have been so kind. I was so glad I had met you, and that Edmund knew you, too. And now I have to go back to horrible smoky old London."

"Yes, and you have not told me exactly why you had to go back so soon," said l'Estrange. "You said something about—marriage. Surely your mother is not thinking of marriage for *you*—yet!"

Julian laughed—rather hysterically; but the sound was pleasant to the listener's ear.

"Of course not," she said. "I'm not *out* yet—I'm in short frocks: I'm a little girl. I thought I was not to come out for two or three years. Mamma can't bear the idea of taking three girls about with her. But my eldest sister's just engaged to be married, and mamma's very pleased about

it, and writes to me that now I can come out next season, and that I must come home at once and get into proper ways."

"What are proper ways?" said the man, smiling.

"Oh, I must not run about any more," Julian answered, dismally. "I must wear gloves, and have my hair done by a maid—I hate being touched by a maid—and learn not to say what I think——"

"Ah, don't do that," said l'Estrange, turning to look at her. "You will be spoiled!"

"Mamma says I am like a baby; that I blurt out everything that comes in my head——"

"That is right. I hope you will always do it—with friends, at any rate. Don't learn to lie and cheat and distort the truth, as women in society are so fond of doing: remember, for Heaven's sake, that there are things dearer than social distinction and a reputation for giving good dinners, or having a well-furnished house—dearer even than diamonds. I must tell you, Julian—you let me call you Julian as you are not 'out,' don't you?—that this was the rock we split upon—the woman I loved and myself. I had no wealth to offer her: I was poor and undistinguished; and she left me—because she wanted a fine house and jewels and a title: that was all. She could not bear to be poor, she said. Don't be afraid of poverty, child: it is worse to be base than poor."

"I know—I am sure it is. I will remember. How cruel of her! I don't think I could have done like that!"

"I don't think you could. You are untouched by the world spirit at present. But I see you are going into the very midst of it. If only one could save you—yet nobody can do it but yourself. Nobody else, Julian: you must fight your own battle."

She looked at him with shining eyes. "I think I shall be able to fight it now. When one knows that there are people in the world who understand—and sympathise—it makes such a difference. It seemed to me before as if perhaps I was only selfish—fighting for my own hand, as it were."

"No," he said, almost sternly, "you will be fighting for right and truth—not for yourself at all. Let that conviction tend to give you courage. Act as if the only things that existed were your soul and God. Then you will be treading the narrow, uphill way towards perfection."

She sat silent and motionless: deeply moved, but a little frightened too. Nobody, in all her short life, had ever spoken to her in this way before. She liked it—she was thrilled by it; and yet she was afraid.

"If you were only there to help me!" she cried presently, with a deep breath of yearning and regret.

L'Estrange sighed. He too was moved. He seemed another man to Julian from the gentle, kindly, dilettante artist whom she at first had known. There was something finer in his face than she had recognised. She felt instinctively that she was in the presence of a nobler nature than one often has the good fortune to find in the journeyings through this somewhat disappointing and troublesome world.

"I cannot be there," he said, very kindly, after that little pause. "I have other duties. But——"

He made a long pause.

"Do you ever come to London—to see the exhibitions?" said Julian, at last, somewhat timidly. "Perhaps some of your pictures will be hung, and you will like to see them?"

"I never exhibit."

"Oh! but why not? They would get in at once—they are so beautiful."

"You think so?"

"Yes, oh, yes! Have you never tried?"

"Never," he answered, gravely, "since I was a mere boy."

Something told her that he had never tried since the day when the woman he loved destroyed his ambition by rejecting him because he was poor. She was sure of it—her instinct told her so. There was a sympathetic tremor in her voice when she spoke again.

"Oh, do try now," she said. "Don't think of the past,

just look to the future and start fresh. You will be famous yet, if you try—and then you will make *her* ashamed."

"I don't think so," he answered gently. "And it is better that she should not hear of me. I don't much want to come into her way again. But—I don't think my pictures are worth exhibiting. I have not much time for them, you know, except during my summer holiday."

"I suppose you have too many lessons?"

"Lessons?"

"I beg your pardon: I thought you gave lessons. I don't know why, except that you taught me so beautifully," said Julian, in confusion.

He took off his hat, and bowed. "I am afraid," he said, "I don't give lessons; I only receive them."

"I don't know what you mean," said Julian, a little crossly. "I thought that you were—an artist. And artists either paint pictures or give lessons, don't they? If you are not an artist, what are you?"

He laughed aloud. She wondered, rather impatiently, why he looked as if he had received a compliment that pleased him very much.

"I cannot claim to be more than an amateur," he said. "And I hardly know how to describe myself. I am writing a book—does that not give me a claim to be called a literary man? Perhaps I am only a student."

"Then you don't *do* anything?"

"I've no profession, I am afraid: not even a trade. You look quite shocked: would you rather I said I kept a shop?"

"I'm not sure. After all you said to me—if a woman should try to do her best, why should not a man?"

"How do you know I am not trying to do my best?" said l'Estrange, glancing up at her.

Julian's reply was long in coming. "I don't know. I think you must be," she said at length. "Only—one always wants to label people—I can't tell why."

"I shall give you no label for myself," said her friend, lightly. "I shall leave myself unclassed. Perhaps, if I come to London—for the exhibitions—we may meet again."

"Oh, do you think it is likely? Could you not come to see us? You know papa and Edmund already."

"They have never been kind enough to ask me to call," said l'Estrange, with great gravity, "but we may possibly overcome that difficulty. If I meet you again, you will be sure to remember me?"

"Of course I shall. And"—diffidently—"I will remember what you have said."

"Ah, if you do that!" He caught himself up, as if he had been about to say something which he afterwards judged inadmissible; and then sighed again. "If you do," he went on more slowly, "I shall think you a noble woman—and a very unusual one."

"I am always told," said Julian, half laughing, "that I am not like anybody else; so here will be a chance to develop my unlikeness."

"You are not like anybody else," he rejoined, gravely. "You are finer, braver, than most girls: you have the capacities, mental and moral, for great development. I shall be interested to see what you make of them. In a year or two, one will know better than one knows now."

He was looking away from her, absently, as she thought, towards the opposite shore. Something curiously impersonal in his tone struck her as cold, and gave her a sense of pain.

"Don't you believe in me?" she asked, plaintively. "I thought you liked me—a *little* bit."

He looked round at her hastily. "Like you, child!" he said. "Of course—that goes without saying, as we are such friends. I have been wishing that I—that I had a little sister—like you."

Somehow the words seemed to trip as they fell from his tongue. "Sister" was not the right term after all. But he would not put it differently: he said to himself that it would not be fair.

"Oh, I wish I *were* your sister!" cried Julian. "I am very fond of Edmund; but he does not help me and teach me things as you do. Had you ever a sister?"

"Many years ago. She died when she was only a child."

"I am so sorry."

"She was eight years old," said the man slowly. "I have never forgotten her. Actually, do you know, I dream about her still, and think I hear her calling me John, as she used to do."

"Your name is John?"

"Yes. Nobody calls me John now."

"I am *very* sorry for you," said Julian. "You seem so lonely in the world—with nobody belonging to you at all. I am afraid I hate that lady you spoke of, when I think of her. I do wish I were your sister, or belonged to you in some way—then I could call you John, and try to make up——"

She spoke in the innocence of her heart, and was amazed at the flame that suddenly darted from l'Estrange's pleasant eyes. At first she thought that he was angry, and she faltered in her speech. But it was not anger that stirred his soul.

"Call me John now," he said, in a quick, low voice.

"John," she said, obediently; then, with a touch of childish sweetness, "*poor* John!" and laid her hand again upon his arm.

He looked at her for a minute or two, still with the strange light in his eyes. Then, very reluctantly, he withdrew his eyes from her face, and fixed them on the ground.

"That's enough," he said, presently, in an altered voice. "Thank you, my dear child. It was very pleasant to hear the old name again. And now I must be going. I am leaving this part of the world in a day or two. So you see we should have to say good-bye very soon in any case."

"I am very sorry," Julian said, once more.

But, rather to her surprise, Mr. l'Estrange did not answer "So am I," and gave her what she considered a rather stiff and formal shake of the hand when he said good-bye.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY THE TARN.

EDMUND'S departure was more regretted by Lisbeth than by Alys. It seemed to Lisbeth, apart from her own attachment to Francis Moor, that Mr. Creighton was a much more suitable husband for Alys than Frank could ever be. They had moved in the same circles, they had many of the same acquaintances and friends: they understood each other. Whereas, Lisbeth thought, with a sore heart, there were secret recesses of Frank's nature into which Alys would never enter; things in his temperament which she could never comprehend. Alys was gentle and clinging, very loving, and anxious to do right; but Lisbeth's keen eyes saw within her a certain power of self-absorption, a shrinking over-sensitiveness to the outside adverse world, which might, if things did not go well with her, develop into positive selfishness.

James Lorimer's training and example had produced a very natural result. Alys had learnt from him to admire beauty, to despise and dislike vulgarity and roughness; to demand, as her right in the world, a certain amount of luxury and amusement. She was so submissive, so gentle, so dependent, that this tendency to softness of fibre was not usually suspected—or, if perceived, was not taken as a fault. She looked so delicate—and she was a little lame, too, which made every one sorry for her—and she had so sweet a manner, as of a person to whom the world ought to be kind, that the tiny speck of self-indulgence did not often appear. Lisbeth saw it, and half despised herself for seeing it; but she had faith in the better qualities of Alys's nature, and thought that they would conquer the evil before long. And but for the time of test and trial which was drawing near, the innate weakness—which was not as yet so very great a failing —might have lain concealed for a lifetime.

Edmund went, and Julian also departed in tears and

tribulation. She told Lisbeth that she should never know what it was to be happy again; and Lisbeth generously invited her to Quest for the rest of her natural life, if only her mother could be got to consent to part with her!

Alys did not cry, but she was very pale; and when the train steamed out of the station, and Julian's head nodded a last farewell from the carriage window, she gazed after it with quivering lips and straining eyes, as if she could not bear to see it go.

Edmund's last words had unnerved her.

"You have chosen your lot, then?" he said, with a bitter smile.

She shrank back a little, trembling in spite of herself.

"Remember," he went on, "that I am always at your service. If you think better of it, you have only to send me a line—a word, and I will come and take you away. For your own sake, Alys, remember this."

"You do not care whether I am false or true," she said, trying to turn the assault.

"No, I don't," he said, almost violently, "compared with the question of your life or death. You may be as false to Francis Moor as you please, and I at least will never think the worse of you."

"I shall not be false to him."

"Very well; I have told you what your fate will be."

Then they shook hands coldly, and Edmund turned away. The conversation had taken place upon the platform, and the train was now advancing. He did not speak to Alys again; but he was remorselessly glad to see the effect his words had had. He carried away a picture of the pale face and dilated eyes, which did not grieve him in the least. Like most men, he thought that everything was fair in love.

Lisbeth, who had also come to the station, saw that he had said something which agitated Alys, but she had no conception of the way in which he was working on her feelings. She did not know, as they drove back to Quest, that the girl was surveying the wild loveliness of hill and

stream with actual repugnance; that the cool breeze from the heights made her shiver; that the cold grey walls of the old house looked to her like those of a prison. Oh, for the warm, close, comfortable London houses, the safe, well-known, if dirty, streets, the life of a town, where everything that concerned herself was well-ordered and luxurious and conventional! Alys repented in her heart that she had ever come to Quest.

But the mood of foreboding and of discontent was evanescent. She had a note from Frank—who was jubilant at Edmund Creighton's departure—as soon as she reached home; and her spirits once more revived. It was delightful to be loved. She was to see Frank on the morrow. She could defy the prospect of loneliness, of bitter weather, even of illness, when he was at her side. Her eyes brightened, and the rose-colour came back to her delicate cheeks.

Later in the day, Lisbeth, finding her on the door-step with a book upon her lap, came and took a seat beside her, putting her arm gently round the girl's waist. Alys nestled to her with a pretty movement like that of a weary bird.

"Dear Lisbeth," she said, caressingly; and that was all.

"You must be very lonely, dear," said Lisbeth, in a gentle voice.

"Oh, don't say it, Lisbeth. I had forgotten about it. Now I shall feel it again!"

"We must get Julian back again one of these days," said Lisbeth, who could not quite understand how any one could banish at will a real and true feeling.

"Yes; but by herself—not with Edmund."

"You don't like Edmund?"

"I like him very well as a friend: not as anything else."

"There is some one you like—as—more than a friend, is there not?" said Lisbeth, almost in a whisper.

"Don't ask me, Lisbeth."

"You had a note from him when we came in?"

The rosy colour that overspread Alys's face betrayed her. But she did not speak: she only raised her head from

Lisbeth's shoulder, and moved an inch away. The movement was, however, eloquent, and Lisbeth sighed as she removed her arm.

"Alys," she said, "I am going to say something unpleasant; but I must say it. I am older than you——"

"If you are thinking that you can scold me because you are older than I," said Alys, with a touch of sharpness in her voice, "you are quite mistaken. Your age does not give you that right."

"But I never thought of scolding. I only wanted to say, dear, that I have known the Moors almost all my life. I love Lady Adela, and I feel that I owe a duty to her. I am afraid she does not know what is going on, and that she would not like it if she did."

Alys averted her face. "You cannot expect me to answer," she said, almost resentfully.

"No, darling. Don't answer. It would be of no use. But it is just this. If you can get Frank—Mr. Moor—to speak to her at once, I shall be satisfied. But, if he does not speak, either he comes to Quest no more, or I go to Lady Adela myself."

"Lisbeth!"

"I must say it, dear. Lady Adela trusts me—I know she does. And I will not have Francis Moor within my doors at Quest, making love to my sister under my very eyes, without her knowledge and approval."

Lisbeth's voice was low and clear, but very stern. She spoke with an intensity of resolution which startled Alys into fear and entreaty.

"Oh, Lisbeth, dear, do leave things alone. It is all right—indeed, it is. There is not the slightest need for you to worry."

"I am not worrying," said Lisbeth, calmly. "Only I wish Lady Adela to know the true state of the case."

Alys could be petulant when she was frightened and distressed. She burst out now with a word of which she did not know the sting.

"You think that because Lady Adela looks down on you,

she will look down on me too. We may be half-sisters, but we are very different."

Lisbeth drew back, and put her hand to her heart, as if she were wounded there. It was a simple, natural gesture, such as might have roused an older woman's pity; but to Alys, in her inexperienced girlishness, which is almost always hard, it seemed theatrical and absurd. Scarcely knowing that she was cruel, she laughed aloud, and, rising from her seat, fled up to her own room, whence she did not reappear for an hour or two.

Lisbeth remained where she was for some minutes, partly because her eyes were full of tears, which she did not wish to let fall. She was obliged at last to raise her head to wipe them away, and then was sorry that she had done so, for she caught sight of Zadock looking at her from over the fence with the scowl upon his face which tears from her always produced. He entered the garden, and advanced slowly towards her, scowling all the time.

"Missy make Lisbeth cry. Squoire made Lisbeth cry," he said, in a sinister tone.

"No, no," said Lisbeth, cheerfully. "Lisbeth's not crying at all—what nonsense! Let us go and feed the fowls."

Zadock's brow cleared: this was his favourite occupation, engaged in which he seemed to forget his wrath. Lisbeth talked to him, and did her work in her usual energetic way; but she went about, feeling as though she had received a deadly wound. For it seemed to her that Frank must have spoken to Alys of his former fancy for her; and perhaps they had guessed the fact of her love for him. It was intolerable to feel that she had been discussed.

She was quite wrong in this impression. Frank had never once hinted to Alys that he had wanted Lisbeth to marry him; and Alys had spoken simply from the social point of view. She considered herself quite the equal to any Lady Adela: and she knew that Lisbeth did not associate with people of Lady Adela's standing in an ordinary way. She wanted to give a pin-prick, but she had given a wound.

She was ashamed, however, even of the pin-prick; and when she came out of the room, she went up to Lisbeth to be kissed, and to murmur a contrite word. But for once Lisbeth drew back. "It does not matter," she said, avoiding the salute. "You will speak to Mr. Moor about what I have said, if he comes here to-morrow, will you not?"

"You are very unkind, Lisbeth," was Alys's reply. And they spoke no more to each other that day. But Alys could not help observing, and being angered by the fact, that Lisbeth waited on her, surrounded her with observances, ministered to her with even more than her usual care and tenderness. The girl's narrower nature did not respond to the woman's generosity. She thought that Lisbeth was playing a part—trying to propitiate her—seeking not to give offence. And she lamented to herself that she had been hitherto so much mistaken in her sister.

The morning brought a cheering glow of bright autumnal sunshine. Alys watched for Frank at the garden gate. She did not want him to come in. But he did not arrive until nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, for he had been detained by business, he said, and could not get away before. He was more inclined to go into the house and rest than take another walk; but Alys persuaded him that they would be happier up by the tarn—"because Lisbeth had turned so disagreeable."

"I never knew Lisbeth disagreeable yet," said Frank, quickly.

"I dare say she thinks she is doing right," returned Alys, with the sigh of a martyr; "but really it is very disagreeable for us. Come up the hill, dear, and I will tell you all about it."

She put her hand within his arm, as they moved away. What was the use of any disguise, she thought, when Lisbeth had spoken of telling Lady Adela? All the world might as well know now that she and Francis were betrothed.

They did not see Lisbeth herself, who came out of the courtyard to watch them going up the hill. Her eyes grew

troubled as she looked, but her mouth was firm. She had made up her mind what she was going to do, and there was nothing more to be said. She did not watch long, or make moan over her own wasted love and buried hopes: she drew her hand once across her eyes and went back to her work. They did not see her, but Zadock saw.

It would have been well if Lisbeth had noticed Zadock's next movements. He went into the stable, and rummaged about for a few moments until he found the knife which he had been cleaning on the day when it attracted Edmund Creighton's attention: this he secreted inside his coat, and then set out, slowly and doggedly, to follow the pair whom he had learnt to hate. There was danger in his look: danger in the deliberate malice of his eye and the scowl upon his brow. He was no longer the harmless fool who had been so long suffered to go at large: the crisis of his malady had come upon him, and he was little better than a raving lunatic, for whose uncontrolled actions no one could be responsible. Danger, indeed, for those against whom he had conceived a grudge, and whom he vaguely wished to punish for the sorrow that they had brought to his beloved Lisbeth.

The lovers went slowly up the hill. Their arms were interlaced; their heads near together, for they were talking busily. They never dreamed that they were watched, tracked, followed, by an enemy as cruel and as implacable as any Red Indian of the West, as any fanatic of the gorgeous East. It never crossed their minds that in England, in broad daylight, in full view of half-a-dozen dwellings, they were in danger of their lives.

They went to the tarn, and sat under a tree for some little while, still talking. The madman crept closer and closer. He could hear, although he could not understand, what they said. He saw Frank kiss the girl at last; and to his brutalised intelligence it appeared that they were again injuring Lisbeth by the kisses that made her cry.

At last they rose and strolled to the head of the tarn, where the banks were steep and precipitous, and they could

look down into the deep tarn water, thirty feet below. They were still talking eagerly.

"Then you will tell her yourself, Frank?"

"Certainly, my darling. As if I would leave it for Lisbeth to do!"

"It is very meddlesome of Lisbeth."

"I can't think what she means by it," said Frank, who was vexed; "but, at any rate, she has roused me to a sense of what is due to you, my darling. I will speak to my mother to-night, when I get home."

"Dear Frank! I am so glad. But will she like me?"

"My sweet love! She will love you, as I do—as I shall —always and for ever."

Zadock was creeping towards them in the grass. His movements were so stealthy that they had not distinguished them. But he was drawing very near.

"What a lovely cluster of rowan-berries!" said Alys. "Do get them for me, Frank."

The tree grew half a dozen yards away, and its branches drooped over the steep bank, but it was easy enough to get the berries to which Alys had pointed with her parasol. Frank moved forward, and the girl remained alone.

Now was the moment! Now the madman saw his chance. He could push her over, or he could even drive his knife into her heart. He would do it, and Lisbeth would be avenged.

Losing all desire of concealment, he sprang to his full height, uttered a strange, unearthly cry, and sprang forward. Fortunately for Alys, he miscalculated the distance, and she was able to start aside. Her scream, as well as Zadock's cry, brought Frank to the rescue.

"Run, Alys, run! He's mad," Frank shouted, as he flung himself between Zadock and the girl.

And Alys ran.

She ran wildly, with her hands over her ears, as if to shut out all hearing of the struggle. For that a struggle of some kind was taking place she knew by instinct, more than by sight or sound. At last her strength failed her, and she fell.

Prone on the earth, she ventured at last to look back. Then she shrieked aloud. On the very edge of the tarn, as it seemed to her, from her point of view, two men were wrestling for life and death. One was strong and brawny: the other was shorter and of slighter build. Oh, who would win? Who would be victor in that terrible struggle for life and death? Was it even possible that Francis Moor could subdue the strength of a great muscular giant like Zadock Verrall?—a strength rendered even more terrible by the fit of madness that had come upon him.

Alys cowered and trembled, but watched in agony. Suddenly a great cry rent the heavens, and the cry was followed by a sound which, even at that distance, reached her ears; the sound of a heavy body precipitated into the waters of the tarn. Whose was it? Who had fallen, and who remained behind? In a frenzy of fear, Alys hid her face, and waited—expecting every moment to hear the madman's steps, expecting every moment to find herself in his murderous grasp. But a deadly silence succeeded to that cry, that plunge into the tarn. Five—ten minutes elapsed, and nothing more was heard. Finally, she ventured to withdraw her fingers from her face, and to look up.

There was nothing to be seen. Zadock Verrall and Francis Moor had alike disappeared.

Then the sky grew black to Alys's eyes, and strange noises sounded in her ears, and for a time the world became to her a perfect blank.

CHAPTER XIX.

SEEKING AND FINDING.

As the day waned and the light faded, Lisbeth became uneasy. She had seen Alys go out with Frank, and expected them to return before teatime. But when six, seven, and eight o'clock had struck, when the autumnal day was clos-

ing in, and still Alys did not appear, Lisbeth began to torment herself with useless conjectures as to what had happened. Was it possible that she and Frank, taking alarm at her threat of revealing all to Lady Adela, had gone off together and did not mean to come back?

This was her first thought. Then she reproached herself for what seemed like a base suspicion. Frank was an honourable man: Alys was a modest and sensitive girl: neither of them would do a thing which might be so fatally misunderstood, and which would expose their friends to such anxiety on their behalf.

This point disposed of, she wondered whether some unforeseen incident had delayed them, and, when she had exhausted all conjectures on that head, she began to think of possible accidents. Had Alys sprained her foot, or turned faint, and been carried to the nearest cottage? Surely Frank himself could not have come to harm? Could they have lost their way—a not impossible occurrence—on the bleak hillside?

Lisbeth went out and looked at the darkening sky. It was perfectly clear: there had been no hint of misleading fog or bewildering storm for many a day. The weather was perfect for the time of year. Then she strained her eyes over the moorland and the dim white road; but nothing could be seen of her sister and her sister's lover. She would find Zadock, she thought, and ask if he had seen them: he had a knack of knowing where Alys was, and Lisbeth could always extract information from him which nobody else could obtain.

She looked for him in the kitchen and outhouses, remembering with surprise, but scarcely with alarm, that she had not seen him about for several hours. His occasional disappearances never disturbed her. He seemed to like to wander away from Quest sometimes: to wander far into the lonely hills; and he was always better in health and happier in disposition when he had made one of these excursions. She had long ceased to be anxious respecting his safety: Zadock was well able to take care of himself.

"Where is Zadock?" she asked of a grinning stable-boy whom she came across.

The boy pointed up the hill.

"Yon gait," he said, briefly. "After squoire and missy." Everybody on the farm knew Alys by the name of "missy."

Lisbeth felt a pang of fear—why, she could scarcely tell.

"Was Zadock pleased to go?" she asked, seeking for some indication of the mood in which he had set out.

"Nay; he was savage as a bear wi' a sair heid," said the lad.

Lisbeth was not offended by the words, for the boy was rather a favourite of hers, in spite of a tongue that was somewhat overbold; he was one of the few people at Quest who seemed to know—instinctively as it were—how to manage Zadock in his surly moods. She paused for a few minutes' reflection; then said, abruptly—

"Get the big lantern, and come with me."

She had a fancy that Alys might be lingering at one of the cottages on the way to the tarn. It would not take her long to go and see.

The boy stared and grunted: he adored his mistress in a loutish kind of way, but he did not attempt to understand her. He waited while she fetched a shawl from the house, and threw on her garden hood; then took up the lantern that he had lighted, and prepared to start. Lisbeth told him to take the path to the tarn, and to stop at every cottage on the way. Surely, she thought, she should find Alys at one of them.

But her search was vain. At no house had Alys called or stopped to rest. One or two of the women said that they had seen her pass by with "the young squire of Moor End" at an earlier hour; but none of them could tell in what direction they had gone. And at last Lisbeth, thoroughly alarmed, sent the boy Robin back to Quest for other helpers; and the men turned out of their cottages to shout and search with lanterns for the missing pair.

Not a few of the searchers had a significant word and

glance aside which were not suffered to come to Lisbeth's knowledge. They had all noticed Francis Moor's devotion to Miss Lorimer: several had made a rude jest now and then on the transfer of Frank's affection from the elder to the younger sister. But they were grave and respectful enough when Lisbeth looked and spoke. They did not care to offend the imperious mistress of Quest.

It was dark now; quite dark, for there was no moon. The outline of the sweeping moor and barren hill could but dimly be seen: the black waters of the tarn were well nigh invisible. The lanterns flashed long rays of light over the stunted grass and furze bushes, but the rays revealed nothing. The men shouted loudly from time to time; but there was no answer save the faint rustling of the wind amongst the underwood.

At last the men gathered into a group, and consulted together in low tones. Lisbeth, who was a little ahead, glanced back and saw them, with heads close together—strange black figures they looked, with gleaming lanterns at their side. She turned and came back to them.

"What is it? Have you found anything? Do you see anything?" she said.

There was a momentary silence. Then Job Tyars, the oldest man in her service, a man with white hair and bowed shoulders, to whom every one turned for help in the hour of need, spoke slowly and reluctantly.

"We think there be nowt to see, mistress."

"And what do you mean by that, Job Tyars?" said Lisbeth, with sudden fierceness.

"We think she be goan for good wi' the squoire, mistress: that's what we thinks."

"You are idiots and fools, then!" said Lisbeth, her anger leaping passionately forth. "How dare you say a thing like that to me of my own sister? She has not come back through some accident, I tell you; she may be perishing with cold on the hillside for all I know. Look till you find her! and any man who speaks of her having gone away—with any one, may take his wages to-morrow morn-

ing and be off, for I'll have none of him; and that I'd say even if it were Job Tyars himself."

"Now nay, mistress, now nay," said Job gently. "There's no need to anger thyself over owt that a young lass may do. But the men don't see the use of going further, and losing their neet's rest. Wait till the morrow, mistress, then we shall look again."

The men, it must be said, were firmly convinced that Alys had eloped with Mr. Moor. Had they really believed that she was in any danger, there would not have been a word said about their night's rest: they would have searched for her high and low. But at present they thought themselves engaged in a foolish search for a young woman who was probably safe and sound in a comfortable hotel, or half way to London by the night express.

The light of the lantern flashed on Lisbeth's face, and showed its expression of bitter resentment and indignation.

"Go to your beds, then," she said, contemptuously. "Give me a lantern. I'll look till I find her, if I go by myself."

"A'll goo wi' thee, mistress," said old Job.

"Me, too," grunted Robin. The youngster and the ancient were for once in accord—a thing that did not often happen.

The other men looked at each other shamefacedly. Then, instead of turning back, they picked up their lanterns and set themselves again to the search. Lisbeth strode on in front, disdainful of their help. She felt, in her rage of helpless fear, as if she could search the whole range of desolate hills alone.

Suddenly the boy Robin, who had kept heedfully to her side, uttered a cry and darted ahead. She followed eagerly, straining her muscles to get up to him. What had he seen? Something white: something which made a little glimmer of something in the darkness: a ghostly heap of some kind among the gorse and heather. Lisbeth sprang forward with a stifled moan. It was Alys—Alys herself, lying half insensible on the bare ground.

In a moment or two they had surrounded her; Lisbeth poured some brandy and water into her mouth, and bathed her forehead. At first she fancied that the girl was dead. But presently Alys opened her eyes, and sighed.

"Are you hurt, my darling?" Lisbeth said, pillowing the golden head upon her breast.

For a minute or two no look of intelligence came into the large blue eyes. Then a strange horror took the place of vacancy, and she raised herself a little to gaze around her with a startled air.

"Is he there?" she whispered.

"Who, dear? Frank?"

"No—no. Zadock!"

"No, dearest, he is not here," said Lisbeth, suspecting only the childish fear of Zadock which Alys had always shown. "Don't be afraid of Zadock."

"But I am afraid. He will come back. He will kill us—he will kill me—as he killed—Frank. Oh!"—and with a wild cry she sank back senseless once again.

"She's delirious with exhaustion," said Lisbeth, suddenly becoming very pale and calm. "She does not know what she is saying. We must carry her to the nearest cottage—it is yours, Job, is it not?"

She carefully gave directions as to what was to be done, and how she was to be carried; but it was with an icy composure which did not seem quite natural. The men looked at one another. They attached more importance to Alys's words than Lisbeth apparently did; for they knew something of Zadock's occasional fits of rage, and murmured among themselves that there were times when nothing could restrain him, and that he ought to be "shut up." But Lisbeth did not know that these whispers were current, and had never been brought to acknowledge that Zadock's affliction was of a dangerous character.

Her fears, now that Alys was found, centred themselves on Frank. Where was he? Where had he left Alys, and what had happened to them both? Possibly some terrible accident had occurred, and Alys had witnessed it—that

would account for the shock that her nerves seemed to have received. But she could only wait, with as much patience as was at her command, until her sister could recover consciousness sufficiently to explain matters.

She had sent a man for the Crosthwaite doctor, and now waited at Alys's bedside; for Job Tyars' comely old wife had put her cottage and all that it contained at the disposal of "the mistress." The homely little bedroom was lighted only by one little tallow candle, by which Lisbeth could hardly see her sister's face; but she kept her hand on the slim wrist, and noted the fluttering of a scarcely perceptible pulse. Alys lay quiet and motionless; her eyes closed, her lips half open. In the faint light Lisbeth could almost have imagined that she was dead.

Suddenly she opened her eyes wide, and Lisbeth bent down, imagining that she would be recognized. If Alys knew her she showed no signs of recognition. She looked straight before her, and asked, as if of some person unknown—

"Is he dead?"

There was a shuddering horror in her tone.

"Who, my darling?"

"Frank."

"No, dear, of course not. Why should he be?"

Then Alys turned her eyes upon her sister for the first time, and answered coherently—

"Zadock has killed him," she said.

Then Lisbeth started a little, and turned pale. "You are mistaken, dearest," she said. "Do not think of such things."

"They are both dead," said Alys calmly. "Better for them both to be dead, don't you think? I could not love a —a—murderer."

She turned deadly white, and began to shiver violently. Lisbeth had to set to work to subdue the shivering fits, but they were succeeded by fever, and in a very short time the girl was delirious, and evidently in a very serious state.

It was not until the dawn was creeping into the little

room that Lisbeth found time to come out into the little kitchen, where two or three men still lingered, talking softly over the fire. Mrs. Tyars was with the sick girl; and Job, who had been snatching an uneasy slumber on the wooden settle, rose to his feet and touched his white forelock respectfully as Lisbeth stood among them. Was it the dawn alone that made her look so pale?

"Job," she said, "and you others, I want you to do me a favour."

They waited while she paused a little—not out of unwillingness, but from an awkward kind of sympathy that did not know how to express itself.

"I want you," she said presently, "now that it is light, to go up to the tarn, to go all round it, above and below. Then come back and tell me if you see anything—anything——"

Her voice broke.

"If any one's hurt, missus?" said one of the men.

"Yes," she answered, eagerly catching at his words. "If any one's hurt. Or if it looks as if there had been a struggle. If the branches are broken—or there are signs of trampling feet. Tell me if you see—anything—strange."

The men looked at her with pity. They understood her fears, rough men as they were, almost better than she did herself.

"Missy talks o' the tarn, I reckon," said Job, tenderly.

"Yes, she does—she does," said Lisbeth, clasping her hands together. "It's horrible to hear—something must have happened, and she has seen it. You must find out for me what it is. Go now—Mary Tyars is with her; and I will wait here till you come back."

She seated herself on a low seat before the fire, and clasped her hands over her knees. The men slunk out with awe-stricken faces. They had never seen their mistress like this before, with the new tremor in her voice and the strange fear in her face. They glanced at her once as they left the room, and Job Tyars solemnly shook his head.

Lisbeth heard their steps die away into the distance, and

sat, with her hands before her, gazing into the red embers of the fire. It was not like her to be so supine, so motionless. But the events of the night had tried even her strong nerves. And Alys, in her delirium, had said strange things—had spoken of a deadly struggle, of a fight for life and death, of a horrible dread of a madman's pursuit.

What did it all mean? Was she simply raving, or was there any foundation for what she had said?

She waited for what seemed to her like an eternity of time. It was not so long—after all; only three-quarters of an hour or thereabouts. But such minutes as these should count as months or years.

"Frank is dead," she said to herself continuously, as if trying to accustom herself to the idea. "Frank is dead. Alys saw him die. No wonder she is ill. The man she loved is dead. The man I loved," . . . and then she got no further; but went on with the dull repetition of the phrase, which for the moment contained the whole of life and death to her: "Frank Moor is dead."

Her nerves were wound up to such a pitch that when Job's hand was laid at last upon the latch, she felt as if she must scream aloud in order to relieve their tension. But she only compressed her lips closely, and turned round on the old man with a face like stone.

"Thou'rt reet, mistress," old Job said, briefly.

She rose from her chair.

"You found him?"

Job nodded, and looked away.

"By the tarn?"

"Ay."

"I am coming," said Lisbeth, resolutely. She drew her shawl closely around her, and rose up. The old man tried to keep her back.

"Nay, mistress, nay," he said, pitifully; "it be no sight for thee."

"If not for me, for whom beside?" she asked him, with a strange laugh, which sounded sadder than a moan.

He did not quite understand, but shook his head, and

followed her as she went straight out of the cottage, and into the track that led to the lower side of the tarn. He had to direct her once or twice, but she made no response in words, only taking in silence the path that he pointed out.

The searchers were collected at a little spot on the edge of the tarn, above which the steep bank rose sheer and straight to a height of thirty feet. They had scarcely room to stand, for there was but a narrow shelving space between the water and the cliff. And here among the tangled brushwood, they had found what they sought. Something—some one—lay upon the ground. They had covered it with a cloak. As Lisbeth drew near the men stood aside. They did not even look as she came swiftly up to them, waved them off with an imperious gesture of her hand, and raised the cloak that covered the horribly silent, motionless thing that they had found.

Then a wild cry rang out upon the air as Lisbeth dropped upon her knees and covered her face with her hands. For she had come upon Zadock's face.

CHAPTER XX.

"MURDER!"

ZADOCK'S dead face—yes, that was what lay before her—Zadock's face—finer in death than in life; for the ugly scowl had gone; the vacant look had been replaced by all the majesty of death. There was, curiously enough, no expression of rage or hatred upon his countenance. It was perfectly calm—noble, even; as if the mists that had beclouded his brain so long had suddenly cleared away, and left it as it ought to have been if James Lorimer's hand had not once struck the growing boy to the ground and inflected an injury that had ceased only with his death.

And surely it was right that his face should wear that strangely new expression of peace and quietude; for the

nature of the man had been originally of peculiar gentleness; and the malice and violence which his madness had produced were in no sense of the word his own fault. Who shall doubt but that the poor fool, despised and dreaded by his companions for his irresponsible acts of lunacy, had entered upon a new life, where the clouded spirit became itself again?

Lisbeth knelt and looked. "Oh, Zadock, Zadock!" she cried, and there was an intensity of grief in her cry which went to the heart of those who heard it. And yet, in her heart, and in the very midst of her sorrow, there was a thrill of relief. She had loved Zadock; but she loved Frank, too; and she was glad it was not Frank.

"Did he fall?" she asked the men, presently. "Did he suffer much?"

"He was nimble as a cat i' some ways," was the evasive answer. "He mout hae fallen—an' again, he mout not. Looks rather as though he had been—pushed over th' edge. But see thee here, mistress!"

They came forward and removed the cloak. Then Lisbeth came forward and saw that a knife had been thrust between the ribs of the unfortunate man, and that his clothes were stained with blood. She recoiled in sudden horror.

"Why, it's murder!" she said, sharply. "Oh, my poor Zadock!"

"I don't think the knife killed him," said Job Tyars. "His neck's broken with the fall."

Lisbeth's eyes began to gleam. "There has been foul play. I'll find out who did this, and——"

She stopped short, and looked for a moment as if she had been struck by a cruel hand. The thought had descended on her like a blow. "Perhaps *Frank* did it." Perhaps Frank had killed the poor fool whom she had loved in spite of his defects; and perhaps that was the explanation of Alys's delirious horror and belief that he also was dead.

"I could not love a murderer," she had said. And, looking on the dead face of poor Zadock, Lisbeth was inclined to

re-echo the words. "How can I love the man who killed my poor boy?" she said to herself.

Then she pulled her wits together. "It cannot be," she reflected. "If there had been any accident of this kind, Frank would have been the first to avow it. He would have come forward and said what he had done. And he would not have used a knife. But some one has done it, and I will bring whoever it is to justice—if I can."

She rose from her kneeling posture, and with a pale face, from which all expression was banished by a violent effort of her will, she gave directions that the police and the doctor should be sent for at once.

"You had better not move him," she said. "I believe it is the right thing to leave him untouched as much as possible until he has been seen. You must go to Crosthwaite—some of you. I will stay here till you come back."

They remonstrated in vain. She drew up her haughty head, and looked at them as a lioness looks at those who try to deprive her of her young.

"Why should I leave him?" she said. "Do you suppose I am afraid?"

"I'll stay beside thee, missus," said Robin, who had followed his mistress from afar, and now was blubbering like a child.

She looked at him and hesitated a moment. "You can stay near me," she said, pointing to the top of the bank. "Go there, and keep watch. If anybody comes let me know. I want nobody down here."

She seated herself on a projecting bank, and drew the shawl over her head, so as partly to conceal her face. The men stole away, almost afraid of her in this mood. They felt, vaguely, in a dim, unconnected way, that they left a tragic figure behind them on the border of that mountain pool. A dead man, watched by a woman with shrouded head and face; the silence of the morning all around; the eastern sunshine slanting over the silent land; the birds twittering cheerfully in the trees—there was a contrast here which affected them without their knowing why.

Lisbeth had almost forgotten Alys. But she knew that Mary Tyars was an excellent nurse; and the doctor said there was little to be done. Alys was safe; but Zadock—the dead Zadock, must not be left alone. So Lisbeth sat and mourned.

A few tears crept slowly down her pale cheeks. But she did not cry or sob aloud—her grief was too great for any such outward manifestations.

Her heart had clung to Zadock in a curious way. He had been a delightful playmate when she was a little child; so much she could remember. The blow that extinguished the light of reason in his eye had been struck by her father —she had long realised the fact, although the old Verralls had never liked her to allude to it, not understanding, as she did, how definite the medical testimony on that point had been. Lisbeth had never forgiven her father for that blow, ever since she learned the truth. She had clung to Zadock with passionate affection; and all through her earlier girlhood her one dream had been of a time when Zadock might be restored to her, when, through some unlooked-for discovery a great surgeon might undertake his cure, and give him back to her as he would have been through all these years if that cruel blow had not been struck—with eyes undimmed, spirit unclouded, brain restored to activity and usefulness. As to his heart, Lisbeth had never thought that it needed alteration: mad or sane, Zadock was ever her faithful slave. By her tender care of him, her refusal to let him be shut up in an asylum, she thought to do her best in reparation of the mischief worked by her father's hand—he had seemed to her as her child for whom she toiled, and whom she loved with all the devotion of her great maternal heart.

Now it was all over. He was gone. There was nothing to live for now. There was no reason why she should be mistress of Quest. She had kept on the farm for his sake; always with the half-hidden, secret hope that "some day" he might get better, and be able to manage it for himself. But this hope, this purpose, was utterly at an end. Zadock was dead, and Lisbeth was desolate.

It may seem strange that she should sorrow so bitterly over the death of a man whose life was a mere burden, and from whom she could obtain neither consolation nor satisfaction of any kind; but just as a mother often loves best the sickly, ailing child, who tires out her strength with its feebleness and its complaints, so Lisbeth cared for Zadock with a protecting love which was not unlike a mother's tender care. Her nature was essentially maternal: she was not happy unless she had a weaker creature to protect.

The sun was high in the heavens before the men came back from Crosthwaite with the doctor and the police. There had been no passers-by. Robin, perched on the cliff above the tarn, had had nothing to relate. He had once ventured to ask whether he should not bring his mistress some food; but she had only looked up to rebuke him sharply for speaking to her, and had then dropped her head over the corpse again. He had not dared to speak to her a second time.

The examination of Zadock's body proved that Job Tyars had been quite right in his surmise. The neck was broken, apparently by the fall. There were livid marks of fingers on his neck and arms; his clothes were torn; and there were signs of a conflict in the broken brushwood and trampled grass at the edge of the bank or cliff. It was perfectly evident that a struggle of some kind had taken place.

"And the knife?" said Lisbeth, in a stifled tone.

The knife, it was found, had not penetrated so far as to cause death. Indeed, the doctor suggested that Zadock might have been holding it himself, and driven it unconsciously into his own side by his fall. But Lisbeth treated this suggestion with scorn.

"Zadock use a knife! He never did such a thing. He never had a knife like that. Did any one ever see him with a knife?" she cried, appealing to the men who stood around.

The men shuffled. They knew what she wanted them to say. And they were not sure of it. One of them, at least, believed that he had seen Zadock with a knife of that kind; but it was difficult to say so, when the mistress was looking at them with angry, indignant, beautiful eyes, and a burn-

ing spot of colour on her pale cheek. He compromised, and remarked, cautiously, that he would not like to say. And no one else volunteered any information.

"Any traces of the other person?" some one inquired.

No, there were no traces. Except one—a stud which Robin had picked up, and was now holding out for inspection. The police inspector took possession of it, and called it a valuable piece of evidence. He did not ask Lisbeth whether she knew it, and she felt a choking sensation in her throat of relief that he did not. *She* recognised it at once. It was one of a set of studs which Francis Moor was in the habit of wearing—plain gold studs, given him by his mother. Lisbeth knew them well.

After a cursory examination, the body was carefully removed, and carried down to Quest. Lisbeth went with it, following the procession like a mourner. She did not seem to come back to her usual self until she had seen all that remained of poor Zadock lying white and still on the big bed in the room which had once belonged to his father and mother. Lisbeth had never cared to use that room. In her heart she called it "the death-room." She might almost as well have called it "the birth-room," for she and Zadock had both been born there; but the fact most inalienably connected with it in her own mind was that her mother, and Zadock's mother, and Zadock's father had all died and been laid out in that room. She had no fear of death, and always imagined herself as retiring to that room to die if ever a mortal sickness overtook her. But she did not give it to the living—it was kept for the dying and the dead.

When this was arranged she began to think of Alys, and her tenderness for the girl began to spring up within her and comforted her a little. She went back to Job Tyars' cottage, and heard a favourable report. The fever had subsided, and the patient had fallen into a natural sleep. When the doctor came, Lisbeth was relieved to hear that there was no danger of brain fever, which he had apprehended, and that the high temperature and delirium had been mainly the result of long exposure to the cold and damp, together

with a severe nervous shock. The doctor was almost surprised to find her so much better.

"I expected more of a complication," he said to Lisbeth, with whom he always spoke frankly. "She might have had rheumatic fever, after lying out there in the night air so long, or the shock, whatever it was, might have touched her brain. She is doing very well now. Have you any idea what upset her?"

"I suppose she saw the struggle—the fight between Zadock and—some one else," said Lisbeth, a little vaguely. Her eyes had a far-away look of distress, which the doctor did not like to see.

"Take care," he said, abruptly. "We shall have you on the sick list next. Don't be over-anxious, Miss Verrall. Has anything been heard yet of the man——"

"Don't speak of it, doctor," said Lisbeth, with sudden sharpness. "I can't bear it yet."

The doctor was surprised. He had never known Miss Verrall of Quest to have "nerves"; and yet that speech unmistakably betokened their existence. He would have liked to give her a soothing draught, but she scouted the suggestion.

"Can we move Alys back to Quest?" was her next question.

He pursed up his lips.

"I'm afraid it should not be attempted for some days. It's not only the moving——"

"What then?"

"I think she had better not be at Quest until everything is over. You know there will have to be an inquest, Miss Verrall. She might hear something of it, and the nervous excitement would possibly return. Can you not keep her here?"

"In this little cottage? It is hardly suitable for her," said Lisbeth, looking round, dubiously.

The doctor smiled. He had heard of Lisbeth's tender indulgence of her half-sister's tastes.

"It is warm and comfortable enough," he said. "You

can send to Quest for all you want. Old Job can turn in with one of his neighbours, or go down to the house, can't he? You had much better stay here."

Lisbeth yielded. She saw the justice of the doctor's remarks; and yet, if she had been able, she would have opposed them bitterly. She was wild with impatience to be back at Quest. Her love for Alys acted, however, as a curb upon her. She could not abandon the girl to Mary Tyar's nursing, nor would she consent to have the services of a trained attendant: she saw that Alys must not be removed to Quest against the doctor's advice, and therefore she was chained to the girl's bedside, and to the moorland cottage. And she would rather—far rather—have watched by Zadock's silent form, and waited for the coming of Francis Moor.

For he would come: she felt no doubt of that.

The police had been "putting two and two together"; they had heard that Alys and Mr. Moor had gone up to the tarn in the afternoon; and Miss Lorimer's strange state, as well as Frank Moor's disappearance, had made them suspicious. They came to Lisbeth and wanted to interview Alys Lorimer; but Lisbeth met them with the doctor's orders that no one save herself and Mrs. Tyars should go inside her door. They tried also to interrogate Lisbeth, but she was too clever to answer them. "If I've anything to to say, I'll say it at the proper time, and in the proper place," she said, in her sharpest tones. "You needn't think to be coming to get news out of me, Mr. Inspector."

The man smiled, and shrugged his shoulders a little as he departed: he knew all about Miss Verrall, and her sharpness of tongue did not disconcert him. It was fully believed in Crosthwaite and the neighbourhood that Frank Moor had had something to do with Zadock's death; and great curiosity was expressed as to how Lisbeth was "taking" it.

"Of course he wasn't her brother, although one gets into the way of considering him as such," said one gossip to another. "He was her step-uncle, by rights: her mother's half-brother."

"They were like brother and sister exactly," said her friend. "Lisbeth Verrall thought all the world of him, although he was but a luny."

"She used to think he would come all right again some day," said the first speaker, confidentially. "She was awful fond of him. Well, it's a good thing Mr. Moor wasn't courting *her*, as folks used to say, for she would never look at him again."

"They say he took up with that soft, white-looking girl that's been staying at Quest," said the other. "She must ha' been with him when the fight, or whatever it was, happened. She'll have to give evidence at the trial."

"If it comes to a trial," said the gossipmonger. "But they say he's fled the country, and gone to Amerikay."

The last report flew over the place like wildfire, and reached the ears of Lisbeth before long. She curled her lip scornfully when she heard it. "I think you forget," she said, briefly, when Mrs. Tyars mentioned the report to her, "that Mr. Moor—if it is Mr. Moor—is a gentleman."

Mary Tyars stared, and did not see that that had anything to do with the matter.

When Lisbeth had a few moments to spare, she walked to the tarn, and generally stood looking for a time into its translucent depths. In her heart she believed that Frank lay at the bottom of the pool. If he were not dead, he would have come back, she said to herself, to tell the story of Zadock's death like a man of honour and a gentleman. If he stayed away, she was sure that it was because he could not come. "Oh, Frank, Frank, my darling," she found herself crying, with arms stretched out towards the silent water, "can you not hear me and come back—even from the other world, if you are there?"

But no answer reached her listening ear, her waiting heart. She walked back to the cottage, and took her place at Alys's bedside. Alys was sleeping; and Lisbeth was able, by and by, to leave her alone and go into the kitchen in order to make some dainty dish with which to tempt the invalid's appetite. It was almost dark, and Mary Tyars had

gone down to Quest. Suddenly Lisbeth paused in her work, and lifted up her head. Some one had paused outside the door: some one was looking in at the little cottage window. Was it Frank Moor?

CHAPTER XXI.

SINNED AGAINST OR SINNING?

LISBETH stepped quickly to the door of Alys's room and closed it. Then she went to the house door and looked out. Francis Moor stood there in the gathering darkness, leaning against the wall. There was a hint of fatigue and exhaustion in his posture which Lisbeth was quick to see; but there was no trace of sympathy in her voice or manner as she put her strong hand on his arm and drew him inside the door.

"What have you come here for?" she said, harshly, but in very subdued tones. "Why do you come creeping up in the darkness like a thief?"

His voice was very hoarse as he replied. "You know why," he said.

There was a moment's silence. The words sounded to Lisbeth like an admission of guilt.

"Every one is wondering where you are," she went on. "You were a fool to run away—perhaps you are a greater fool to come back. You have put yourself in the wrong."

"Lisbeth!" said the man, appealingly; "Lisbeth! You were never pitiless before. Let me speak to you—I want to tell you all."

"I don't want to listen," said Lisbeth, turning her shoulder to him, so that she should not see his haggard eyes. "If it were you, indeed—and you say it is—who killed my poor Zadock, my poor boy that I have worked for and tended so many years, why should I ever want to see your face again?"

Why, indeed? Her heart cried out hungrily for the

sight, in spite of all her hard words. But she kept her eyes away from his white, pain-stricken face.

He turned to go, as if he had not another word to say. But—either from illness, or hunger, or distress of mind—he was very weak; and as he went he staggered and almost fell, catching at the door-post to support himself, and leaning his head for a moment against the wall. Lisbeth flew to his side, and altered her tone at once.

"Lean on me," she said, with sudden gentleness. "There! you're tired and ill, I see. Sit down here for a minute or two, and I'll give you some soup. You look as if you wanted it."

He seated himself, but shook his head when she presented him with food. "I can't eat," he said, "and I could not take it from your hand, when you think—as I see you think of me."

"You don't know what I think," said Lisbeth, brusquely. "Take what I give you, and don't behave like a child, Frank Moor. Why—Frank?"

She could not help the word, the softening tone, the rush of love and pity at her heart. For Frank's head had sunk upon his hands, and he was actually crying—more from exhaustion, perhaps, than from mental distress; but the sobs came against his will, and he could not check them for a little time. Lisbeth forced him at last to eat and drink, but she gave him back his self-control by a word of warning rather than by the food.

"You *must* keep yourself quiet," she said sternly; "for Alys is ill in the next room, and if you disturb her I won't answer for the consequences."

He recovered himself at this, sat up, and gulped down the cold water which she had brought him.

"I beg your pardon," he said, when he was a trifle calmer; "I ought not to have come to you. But I did not know that I should be making such a fool of myself. I will go in a minute or two."

"Where are you going?"

He met her eyes determinedly.

"I am going to Crosthwaite to the police-station."

"Yes?" she said, with a quick, indrawn breath.

"To give myself up for being the cause of Zadock Verrall's death. Poor Zadock! You know me better, Lisbeth, than to suppose that it was intentional on my part. I was innocent of a murderous motive, I suppose. . . . But I killed him; yes, I killed him, and I am ready to take the consequences."

"You killed him?" whispered Lisbeth, her eyes fixed on his face.

"God knows I would give my own life to call back his, Lisbeth—if only for your sake—and hers!"

"What had *she* to do with it? What did she see?"

"She has not told you?"

"She has not been able to talk without bringing on fever and restlessness, and the doctor tells us she must not be encouraged to speak. She has been delirious—she talked then—I heard a good deal then, but I did not know how much of it was true."

"I can tell you that better than any one," said Frank, sorrowfully.

"Yes, but—Mary Tyars may come back at any moment, and I must not leave my sister so long alone. Yet I must hear what you have to say. Can you wait for me? and I will come out by and by."

"I will wait as long as you please. But—Lisbeth, we are here alone, and Alys is lying there—could I not see her once again? I want to tell her, to——"

"No, no, you must not see her. It would be too dangerous. It would excite her too much."

"Does she not want to see me?" said Frank, in a tone of such pain that for a moment Lisbeth stood silent, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Alys has had a great shock," she said at last, in a lower and gentler voice. "She cannot bear any excitement at present. I do not know how she feels towards you when she is in her right mind——"

"You mean that in her delirium she shrank from me?"

"Am I to tell you what she said?" asked Lisbeth, passionately. "Well, if you want to hear, you shall. She said she could not love a—murderer. She said it would be better if you *both* were dead."

Frank stood up with a ghastly face. "She is quite right," he said. "If I were at the bottom of the tarn, it would, at least, be well for me."

The words were no sooner out of Lisbeth's lips than she regretted saying them. And Frank's tone and look frightened her.

"Don't speak like that," she said, her pain taking as usual the form of imperiousness. "She did not know what she was saying; but you do, and you need not talk wicked nonsense. You had better wait to hear what she says when she comes to herself."

Frank was silent for a moment. "And you—you, too—think that of me, Lisbeth," he said, at last.

In spite of herself she trembled. She did not want to tell him what she had thought.

"Time enough for me to say what I think when I have heard your story," she said, coldly. "Mary Tyars may be here directly, and she must not find you in the house. Go outside: it is dark now, and you won't be seen. I will come in about half an hour."

"Does it matter whether I am seen or not?" said Frank, rather bitterly.

She evaded the question. "Please go," she said. "I have no time to talk. Go for my sake if not for your own," she went on vehemently. "The neighbours would think shame of me if they knew that I had been talking with you to-night."

Without a word he turned to the door, opened it, and went out into the night.

Then the woman who had seemed so cold and hard to him drew a curtain over the lattice window, and sank upon her knees by the chair where he had sat. The tears flowed down her cheeks, and her whole frame was shaken by a few short, convulsive sobs. It was not often that Lisbeth wept,

and tears did not come readily with her; but the words with which her sobs were mingled rose easily to her tongue.

"Oh, my God, help him!" she cried. "And help Alys—and help me. We are all in a sore strait, Lord . . . but Thou knowest all, and Thou canst do what we can't do for ourselves. I loved my poor boy—and he is dead; and the man that killed him looks to me for help . . . and I love him too. I cannot tear him from my heart, good Lord. I shall love him as long as I live—in this world and the next; and Thou wilt help me to help him—to save him—to love him—at any cost!"

She was in the habit of praying thus for help and guidance, and the calm of a great deep-seated faith was not easily disturbed within her. After a few minutes spent in silence, she rose from her knees, dried her eyes, and went on with her preparations for Alys's meal. When it was ready, she entered the other room, and proceeded to light a lamp and give her patient the food which she had brought, without the slightest trace of agitation in her manner.

Alys took it passively, almost without speaking; but when she lay back upon her pillow again, she said faintly:—

"I thought I heard some one speaking."

"I was speaking to—a tramp," said Lisbeth, calmly.

"You talked—a good deal."

"I gave him some food. He was nigh perishing of hunger."

There was a short silence; and then Alys said, in a trembling voice—

"It was not Frank?"

An almost imperceptible pause followed. By nature Lisbeth was the most truthful of women. She hated a lie with a fierce hatred, such as she gave to cowardice and cruelty, and other of the meaner vices. But what could she do in this case? She bit her lips, and—for *their* sakes, she said to herself—she told a lie.

"Certainly not Frank," she said.

Alys seemed but half satisfied. "It sounded so like his voice! Lisbeth—if he comes, don't let me see him!—don't

—not yet, at any rate! I could not bear it, indeed, I do not think I could."

"You shall never see him unless you wish, my darling," Lisbeth said.

The girl said no more, and Lisbeth waited quietly until Mary Tyars returned from Crosthwaite. It was nearer an hour than half an hour before she was able to escape from the cottage, and take the path, but faintly visible in the starlight, which led to the banks of the tarn. She knew that she should find Frank there.

She was not mistaken. She had not gone very far before a dark figure joined her, and walked at her side without a word. Lisbeth led the way—not to the spot where the fatal conflict had taken place, but—to a lower ground, where they were screened from the sight of wayfarers by a bank of brushwood and a few straggling trees. Here they seated themselves on the trunk of a fallen tree, for the night was warm, and Lisbeth had pity on Frank's evident weakness and fatigue.

It was she who spoke first. "Now, tell me," she said, in a low voice. "Tell me what you like."

"There is very little to tell," said Frank, in a tone of utter depression. "I have been a fool—I need not have thrown my chances away— I need not have spoilt my life; but I seem to have done both."

"Is that all you can think of?" said Lisbeth, bitterly.

"No, indeed, it is not," he said, stung to manlier indignation by her tone. "I bitterly regret what has happened for *your* sake. I have been haunted all these days by the thought of your sorrow. You loved him, I know, poor fellow; God knows I would not have hurt a hair of his head if I could have helped myself."

"Yes, I loved him," said Lisbeth, in slow, measured accents, from which, however, the bitterness had died away. "I loved him because he represented all that was left to me of home and family. Alys has come into my life too lately to take his place. When I saw him, I recollected that I had something beside myself to live and work for; that he was

my charge, my care, my duty: the world was summed up for me in Zadock, who lies in the death-room at Quest—quiet enough now, and not likely to get into anybody's way. . . . If we are to talk selfishly—and it seems impossible not to do it in a case of this kind, when pitying neighbours are apt to tell me that I should be thankful after all that he is dead—I should say that what you have accomplished is not only the death of poor Zadock himself, but the death in me of anything tender and loving and gentle—the one home-tie which kept me from becoming hard and miserable and cold. If you have spoiled your own life, you have spoilt mine too. It is a selfish consideration, but it seems that we are bound to be selfish."

"You are not speaking the truth," cried Frank, almost passionately. "You could never be hard or cold. It is not in your nature."

"It is in my nature as much as it is in all of our natures, when we have nothing to care for," she answered. "What have I had in my life? A father who neglected me, and took away the reason of the dearest playfellow and comrade I could have had! My good grandfather is dead, and Zadock now is dead; there is Alys left, but Alys does not love me as I love her. And now you—you—my old friend——"

She stopped abruptly: something rose in her throat and hindered the power of speech. She said, after a pause, in a roughened, jarring voice—

"You have done me the greatest injury in your power; that is all."

He misunderstood her completely, as she meant him to do. He thought that she was alluding only to Zadock's death; whereas she meant also that Frank had injured her by winning her heart and throwing it away. But this, of course, he could not understand.

"I see," he said heavily, "that I have, indeed, done you a great wrong. I came back, hoping that I might at least win your forgiveness, your pity, for what happened the other night. But, you are right: Zadock's death *has* made you hard already; you do not care to think that I was virtually

the victim of circumstances, and—I firmly believe—in no wise to blame."

They sat still after this for a little while. A wind went soughing through the branches of the trees; the water of the tarn was a little ruffled, and they heard it lapping among the stones below their feet. It seemed as though the spirits of the night had called to them and bidden them to love and pardon. There was a tranquil look about the cloudless sky, with its hosts of shining stars; there was complete silence among the everlasting hills. Frank did not look up: he sat with his elbows on his knees and his face half-hidden by his hands. But Lisbeth looked: and to Lisbeth, the influences of the hour brought back the memory of those moments when she had knelt and prayed.

"I am wrong," she said at last, in a gentler tone. "I said I was miserable; but at least I need not be wicked. I do not want to be hard on you. I will forgive you if I can. You know I always found it difficult to forgive. But tell me how it happened: I ought to know."

And then Frank told his story—how he had heard a cry from Alys, and, turning round, saw Zadock running upon her with a knife in his hand; and how he had flung himself on the madman and wrestled with him to get the knife away. Alys had fled, and he knew not whither she went, but possibly she had seen the whole.

"We came nearer and nearer to the edge, in spite of all my efforts," said Frank. "I tried in vain to get him away —I tried to loose myself, but it was no use. For some time I held his arm, so that he could not use the knife—he was mad, Lisbeth, mad as he could be, and did not know what he was doing in the least: but at last he got it free, and raised his hand. I struck out wildly, I don't know how; but his hold suddenly relaxed, and he fell backward over the edge of the cliff and amongst the brushwood, where you found him, down below."

"And then——?"

"Then, in great horror and fear, I made my way down the bank, and tried to revive him. I could not be-

lieve at first that he was dead. But at last I gave up hope."

"You should have done something. You should have called the cottage people at once, and told them how it happened," said Lisbeth, in a stifled voice. "Then they would have believed you. Now" . . . she made a long pause, and finished her sentence at last with an effort, which showed how much it cost her. "Nobody will believe you now."

"That is true. And, perhaps . . . perhaps, I do not deserve that they should."

Lisbeth looked at him. "As your story runs now, you were not—I suppose—to blame," she said, grudgingly.

"Yes, as it runs now. But—I don't know whether I have told you the truth or not."

"What do you mean?"

"My brain reels when I think of it, as it reeled then," said Frank, pressing his hands to his brow. "It is just this, Lisbeth: it came upon me as I stood beside Zadock's body, and the thought drove me into the wilderness like Cain. If I had held my hand at that last moment—if I had not struck him as I did, with a wild momentary rage, a desire for my own life, and for his death—for one of us had to die, I felt no doubt of that—he might not have fallen as he did. Whether the world counts me to blame or not, I cannot say; but—I have felt during the past few days—as though I had been indeed—a murderer. Ay, you may well shrink from me, Lisbeth: I cannot expect you to forgive me now."

CHAPTER XXII.

FORGIVENESS.

He hid his face again with a gesture of despair. He expected to hear words of reproach from Lisbeth—words of bitter anger and desolation. But he was mistaken: his con-

fession did not produce any such effect. In fact, a curious revulsion of feeling took place within her. Now that she knew what Frank had really done, and how Zadock had come to his end, she had nothing but pity for the man who struck the fatal blow.

"You are mistaken," she said, after a pause. "I could forgive you more easily now—than before."

"That is quite impossible. I am beyond the pale. Do not force yourself to say kind things to me, Lisbeth. I know too well what you—and Alys—feel."

"I and Alys are two different persons. I have no shrinking from a man merely because he has taken another's life——"

"And Alys has?"

"You had better not ask me. I do not know how she will feel when she is strong again. At present—but go on with your story: you have not yet told me all."

"There is little to tell. I rushed away from the place, feeling myself an outcast from mankind. The sight of his face—rigid in death—the death I had——Lisbeth, I can't go on."

"Tell me what you did, not what you felt. Where did you go?"

Frank lifted his face a little, and considered.

"Upon my soul, I can hardly tell you," he said. "I rushed away over the hills, losing the track, forgetting that others would be anxious about me, forgetting everything except that face—which I wanted to escape, and could not get away from. I think my brain had some sort of shock—I do not know exactly what I did. I spent a day or two on the hills, and then I got a train and went to London—but, why, I could not tell. The thing that brought me to myself was the heading of a newspaper placard: 'Shocking occurrence near Crosthwaite,' or something of that kind. When I saw that, I knew I ought to have made a clean breast of the whole story. So I came here to do it."

"I am sorry you went away," said Lisbeth, gently. "You ought to have stayed. It would have been braver to stay."

Frank uttered a sort of groan.

"I have not been brave. I have been a fool—and worse," he said. "Tell me what has happened here, Lisbeth, for I know nothing."

"We found Alys insensible, about midnight, I think. You forgot *her*, Frank. She has been ill ever since. And at dawn *he* was found. The inquest was held on the second day afterwards. Alys was too ill to attend it, but she made a short statement—a deposition, I think, they call it—that she had seen you and Zadock struggling together, but that she did not know how the struggle ended. And she said that Zadock attacked her first."

"Ah!"

"But she seemed to know nothing about the knife. Where did that come from, and why was it in his side?"

"He had it in his hand. He may have fallen on it."

"You did not stab him?"

"Lisbeth!"

"They have said you did. Oh, you do not know the things they have said about you. The verdict was manslaughter, Frank: it would have been murder but for Alys's declaration that she saw my poor boy attack you first; and there is a warrant out for your arrest—you did not know?"

"I did not know or guess. But it comes to the same thing."

"Not quite, Frank. If you had been here at first!——"

"I see," said he, quietly, and then the two sat silent for a little while.

"And you believe all they said, Lisbeth? You, my old friend!"

"I could not believe that you had used the knife. It seemed a cowardly thing to do."

"I don't know why I should be glad that you give me even that amount of credit," said Frank, half-bitterly, half-sadly. "As I told you just now, I feel myself guilty—the murderous instinct rose in me——"

"No," said Lisbeth, cutting him short, and speaking in

her usual clear and steady tone. "That I will not allow you to say. An instinct of self-defence: it was no more than that. Now that I know all the truth, I can judge, and I will not condemn. Before—when I thought you had driven the knife into his side—when I thought that you had fled from justice and had refused to bear the punishment the law decreed—then I despised you. But now I do not despise you, Frank: I honour you, because you have come back; and I will not—I will not hate you—any more."

Her voice quivered as she spoke the last few words. She had gained an immense victory over herself; and she had gained it by force of her sense of justice, rather than of love. She was hardly prepared, however, for Frank's passionate gratitude. In a moment he had thrown himself down before her, sobbing out his grief and his thankfulness, with his head bowed first to the ground, and later upon his very knees. She stroked his soft dark hair as he lay there, as if she were a mother with an erring child; but she said very little. She could not dare to let him know how pitiful she was, how dearly she loved him after all.

The passion spent itself at last, and then she spoke slowly and gravely.

"You will have to go through with it all," she said, "and I don't know what they will do with you. But you won't forget that I am your friend—that I will do all I can for you—strange as it may seem to those who know that I loved Zadock as if he had been my brother. But you are another brother, too."

"More than brother!" her heart cried out; but she would not give it voice.

"You must not despair—you must not be cast down. You must believe in yourself and in me. I know, and you know, that you would not have hurt Zadock for the world, if you could have helped it. It was—mostly—an accident; and we must make the other people believe it if we can. Only, you *will* be brave and strong? You will not give way to despair again? Promise me—for Alys's sake; for your mother's sake and mine."

"I promise. I have the courage now that I lacked before."

"You will conquer if you have courage. Nothing matters—nothing that the world can do, I mean, will make any difference to those who love you, if you do not let yourself sink. Your true friends will be true to you."

"And Alys."

"I can speak to Alys about you now. She will learn to understand. And now I must go back to her—and you, what will you do?"

"I will go on to Crosthwaite."

They rose and stood facing one another in the dim starlight. "Good-bye," she said, in a low tone. "Remember that—after all—I forgive you: I wish you well."

"Lisbeth, can you give me your hand? Mine—has blood upon it."

She held out both her hands, and let him hold them in his own for a moment. She did not forgive by halves.

"God bless you," he said, in a tone of the deepest feeling. "If all women were like you! Lisbeth, good-bye."

"God be with you, Frank," she said: translating the word of farewell into a longer phrase. She was standing on rather higher ground than he. She bent a little forward, and kissed him on the forehead, as a mother or sister might have done. To him in his strained and fevered state, the kiss was like a benediction.

Then they separated. She went back, slowly and mournfully, to the cottage; and he, after watching her until her tall figure disappeared in the darkness, set out at a brisk pace for Crosthwaite. The weight on his heart and brain seemed half removed now he had seen her and heard her say that she forgave.

Of Alys he could scarcely bear to think at all. Her memory was like an ever-present pain—an open wound. She had produced on him an impression of perfect and spotless purity, of exquisite refinement, of culture, which made her something like an exotic flower in the northern wilds. He was afraid that she would shrink from him, that she

would never forget that—even in her defence—he had killed a man. His love was of the passionately adoring kind: he saw the angel rather than the woman in her. He admired her fragility, her delicacy, her gentleness—just the qualities in which Lisbeth was lacking, just the qualities which, as he failed to see, might constitute a kind of weakness in the hour of need.

He comforted himself with Lisbeth's words. She had said that none who loved him truly would love him less for *this*. She would tell Alys so. And Alys would believe her, and would be true to him through all that remained to him to do and bear. He thought, as he strode along the silent road, that even then Lisbeth might be telling Alys that she might trust him still, for had he not come back to do his duty, to pay, as far as in him lay, each farthing of his debt?

Poor Frank! His imagination played him false. Alys was in no state even to hear his name; and although Lisbeth thought of him day and night, and made herself acquainted with every detail of the things that were happening to him, she did not dare to speak to her sister on the subject until fully a week had passed.

She got Alys down to Quest at last. The girl was much better, although still weak; but she was able to leave her room and lie on the broad soft couch which Lisbeth had placed for her use in the sitting-room. There was no chance of her being able to sit in the garden for many days to come; the autumnal winds had broken loose, after the long space of summer calm, and they went howling round the house until Alys shivered at the sound as if she thought that it was like the cry of some wandering soul in pain.

Little by little she began to perceive that the life of Quest was going on in much of its old routine. Lisbeth spent more time with her than usual, but otherwise she was busy about household matters, just as she used to be. The old lady in the kitchen nodded over the fire, more peaceably than ever. There was no disturbing element now, no vacantly fierce face to scowl at poor Alys as she went along the passages, no growl of anger to meet her on the stairs.

If Zadock had been removed from her path in any other way, she would have been heartily glad of his absence.

Nobody spoke to her of what had occurred; and she herself, with returning strength, began to feel a glimmer of curiosity as to how things had gone. She summoned up strength at last to say to Lisbeth, in a hesitating way—

"I suppose—Mr. Moor—is not at home?"

Lisbeth came at once and took a seat beside her.

"I am glad you have asked me," she said, "because there are two or three things that I want to say."

"Oh—not about *him*," said Alys, shrinking away.

"Why not?" said Lisbeth, almost cheerfully. "You will be glad to know that you can help him."

"I—help him? How?"

"You have your story to tell, darling. There is a very clever gentleman—a lawyer—coming to see you to-morrow, and you will tell him everything—all that you saw and heard on that afternoon upon the hill."

"I can't—I can't!" said Alys, her eyes dilating with horror. "I can't bear to think of it—why must I go over it all again? Indeed, I can't."

"For Frank's sake," said Lisbeth, softly.

There came a change over Alys's face, such as Lisbeth had never seen before. It was a dark look—half of terror, half of anger—a look that positively disfigured the face that was usually so sweet.

"I cannot understand how you should speak of him in that way," she said.

"Do you not?"

"You used to say you loved poor Zadock," said Alys, vehemently. "You seemed to care for nobody but him. You did not mind how much he frightened other people—or even injured them. Indeed, you did not; he was all the world to you. It was very good of you, no doubt, to be so kind to him."

"Alys, he was like a brother to me."

"I know. But he was not like a brother to anybody else," said Alys, with the persistency of a weak nature that

had burst the bonds of fear, after harbouring it for many weary days. "Every one was afraid of him, but you would not see it. You kept him here against everybody's advice. Yet now, when he is dead, you don't mind! You want me to help the man who killed him! Why, even I—who did not care for Zadock—I hate to think of the horrible savage look on Frank's face, the fierceness, the brutality. And you ask me to help him in some way! I think it is horrible!"

"Alys, dear, do you not see that it was an accident?"

"No, indeed, it was not—it was a fight. Oh, I suppose men must fight; and Zadock was mad, and had to be mastered; but Frank need not have killed him for all that. You are a cold-hearted woman to forget the dead so soon."

"Perhaps I am," said Lisbeth, slowly. She sat looking straight before her, almost wondering why she did not feel more keenly the sting of what Alys had been saying. Was she cold-hearted? She had never thought so before; "but one lives and learns," said Lisbeth to herself, without bitterness. "I thought you loved Frank," she said at last.

Alys answered with unaccustomed emphasis. "Love a man who is to be tried for murder? I couldn't, if I tried."

"Who told you that he was to be tried for murder," said Lisbeth, with a frown.

"I heard it through the window. Two of the servants were talking outside, but they did not say whether he had got away or not. I suppose he did."

"It is manslaughter, not murder," said Lisbeth, calmly. Then after a pause she added, "He is out on bail at present; but he is to be tried next month at the Crossbury Assizes, and you and I will probably be called as witnesses."

Alys uttered an exclamation of horror. "Oh!" she wailed, "why did I ever come to Quest? Oh, let me go away from this dreadful place!"

It was long before Lisbeth could soothe and comfort her —in fact, from that day forth, she seemed to look upon Lisbeth with a certain amount of suspicion. It was to her almost incredible that Lisbeth should regard the man who

took Zadock's life with anything but aversion. Her feeling for Frank had changed into a kind of shrinking abhorrence, which sprang very largely out of a physical recoil from all that was painful and violent. This dread of suffering or of ugliness in any shape or form was the inheritance which her self indulgent father had bequeathed to her.

Mr. Crisp, the Moors' family solicitor, came to see her shortly afterwards, and made her tell him the whole story from beginning to end. He was a fatherly old man, very fond of Frank, whom, however, he had never understood, and he had been prepared to find a flaunting milkmaid of a girl with whom Frank had had a foolish flirtation. He was amazed to find this dainty, delicate creature, with lovely face and beautiful draperies, and slender white hands, in the old farm-house at Quest: and he took back to Lady Adela a description of Alys Lorimer very different from the picture which they had constructed for themselves.

"Why, she is a lady, then?" said Lady Adela.

"As far as birth can make her so," said the lawyer, with a little smile.

"Her testimony will have all the more weight——"

"Exactly. If she gives it in the right way, and on the right side. For some reason or other she seems—prejudiced."

"That must be Miss Verrall's doings," said Lady Adela, bitterly. "We all know how Lisbeth Verrall petted and protected that wretched madman. If she could, she would make this girl doubt even the testimony of her own eyes, and proclaim my poor Frank a murderer."

"I think nobody can doubt but that the blow was struck purely in self-defence," said Mr. Crisp. But he was beginning to feel uncomfortable. It was an awkward thing to find that the only witness of the scene was inclined to take the worst possible view of Frank's behaviour. Alys had said very little; but her look, her tone, had been enough. Mr. Crisp did not trust her as a witness for Frank Moor's defence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"COME!"

EDMUND CREIGHTON was sitting at his breakfast with the *Times* before him, when his eyes first fell upon the name of Crosthwaite. It attracted him, of course, and he at once read the account, as at first given, of Zadock Verrall's death. Frank Moor's name was introduced, but Alys was not mentioned. In fact, Lisbeth all along kept reporters and interviewers at arm's length, and would not allow any access to Quest, or to the cottage where Alys was lying ill.

Edmund telegraphed for news, but was obliged to gather it after all from the papers, especially the evening journals, which made much capital out of "the tragedy," as they usually called it; for Lisbeth answered by a few brief words only, stating that Alys had been very ill, but was now better. Armed with this note, and after collecting every atom of information that was to be obtained, Edmund proceeded to pay his mother a morning call.

He had ceased to live at home. The atmosphere was uncongenial, especially since his visit to Crosthwaite. Mrs. Creighton never lost an opportunity of throwing out disagreeable remarks concerning Alys, and the refusal which she suspected, although Edmund had never confessed it; and, although his blandness of manner was seldom disturbed, he found these remarks more trying to his composure than he liked. Accordingly, he had taken for himself a luxurious suite of apartments at the West End, and lived his own life, which was a curious mixture of hard work and self-indulgence. He was already successful in his profession, and determined to be more so; and he was not insensible, in the interval of his work, to the attractions of various pastimes of a refined order which he imagined to be necessary for his well-being. He was materialistic to the backbone; and had really serious reason to doubt whether he possessed anything in the nature of a soul. If he had had one once, he had perhaps destroyed it.

Not that he was what the world calls a bad man. He was too fastidious, too refined, to have any vices. He simply lived for his own pleasure; and he who makes pleasure his deity has no force wherewith to withstand temptation to evil. When we put our necks under a yoke to the world, we have no conception what baseness the world may not require of us by and by; and when the time comes, we do the base thing because we are slaves already and cannot escape it.

Edmund walked coolly into his mother's morning room, and sat down in his favourite chair. His mother, seated at her writing-table, turned upon him almost with excitement.

"Well, Edmund, I suppose you have heard this disgraceful story?"

"What disgraceful story?" said her son.

"All about that wretched madman's death. Alys Lorimer's share in it is very freely commented on in most of the papers. I feel extremely sorry that I ever allowed Julian to associate with her."

"I fancied," said Edmund, "that you might have some notions of this kind; and that was why I came round to you this morning. You see it is somewhat important to me what you say of Alys Lorimer, because she will one day be my wife."

"Nonsense, Edmund! A girl whose character is impugned in this way."

"I do not see in what way it is impugned."

"My dear boy! To begin with, she had an assignation—that is evident—with this Francis Moor. Don't you recollect him? he came here one day with your father——"

"I saw something of him at Crosthwaite. He had known the Verralls all his life. He often came to Quest."

"Well, Alys was evidently meeting him in secret, and was alone with him away among those lonely hills—most improper—when this half-witted person made an assault on her. Really, I almost think it served her right!"

"Served her right to be run at with a knife because she

happened to be taking a walk without a chaperon?" said Edmund, irreverently. "My dear mother, you are driving things too far."

"Not at all, Edmund. Alys had been brought up in London, and knew what propriety was, but she seems greatly to have forgotten her training. I have been questioning Julian, and have, with great difficulty, extracted some deplorable details. I was greatly displeased with Julian."

"I don't think she came to much harm. Where is she?"

"In her room," said Mrs. Creighton severely. "I could not put up with her impertinence any longer, so I sent her there to stay till lunch was ready. It seems that she ran wild completely, and that Alys was as bad."

"Neither Alys nor Julian did anything that need be remembered against them," said Edmund, firmly. "You have got an entirely wrong idea into your head, mother. In an out-of-the-way place like Crosthwaite, people don't think about chaperons. Alys was out quite naturally for a walk with Frank Moor when this half mad fellow came up——"

"With a knife," said Mrs. Creighton, in a tone of holy horror.

"A knife, eh? Had he a knife?" said Edmund, stopping short. "I thought there was some doubt about it."

"A doubt! There is always a doubt," said Mrs. Creighton, contemptuously. "He was found stabbed—so somebody must have had a knife."

"Ah, yes, but the question is, which of them? However, if I'd been there, I should have had not the slightest hesitation in doing what Frank Moor seems to have done. I should have pitched the fellow over the cliff, or stabbed him to the heart, with the greatest satisfaction in the world. What I cannot understand is, why Moor took to his heels afterwards, and disappeared for the greater part of a week. That will prejudice a jury against him."

"You may be quite sure that there is something more to come out," said Mrs. Creighton, impressively. "It is a most scandalous affair. I am sorry we have had anything to do with Miss Lorimer."

"You will have a good deal more to do with her, if things turn out as I wish and intend," said Edmund, quietly. "Mother, I came here to-day to ask your help on her behalf."

"Excuse me, Edmund. I do not wish to interfere."

"As my promised wife, Alys has a right to turn to you for help."

"*Is* she your promised wife, Edmund?"

"Virtually," said Edmund, with the greatest *sang froid*. "And this is the time when we can be of service to her. I want to go down to Quest, as soon as I can get away, bearing an invitation from you to her—to come and stay here for the next few weeks or months, until the wedding day is fixed, in fact," he added, with a smile. He thought that he might as well take things for granted: knowing Alys as he did, he felt sure that she would turn to him in the hour of her need.

"Why should she come here?" said Mrs. Creighton, with strong displeasure.

"To stop the world's tongues for one thing. To give her a home—and a change from Quest. It is not at all advisable that she should remain there. Her nerves must have had a frightful shock. I should like her to come away at once."

"She will have to be a witness, I suppose, at this horrible trial."

"She could go back for that. Let me go to her, and invite her to come at once."

Of course Edmund did not know that at that time Alys could not possibly have travelled: she had not then even been moved to Quest; but he had not had sufficient information from Lisbeth to be aware of her state.

"I am very sorry, Edmund," said his mother, with decision, "but I must really refuse your request. I have young daughters, I cannot let them associate with any one so regardless of the laws of society as Miss Lorimer has proved herself to be."

Edmund uttered a short, irritated laugh. "Poor Alys!"

he said. "I believe she adores propriety in her heart, and hates the wilds to which Fortune has condemned her."

"Why did she go there, then?"

"Where else had she to go, mother?"

"She knew very well that you were dying to marry her," said his mother, scornfully. "She chose to refuse you—I know it well enough—and she will refuse you again. I hope she will. She is one of those persons who have the faculty of attracting disaster. I am not superstitious; but I do think some people are born to be unlucky. Alys Lorimer is one of them, and I will not have her here."

"My only resource, then, will be to marry her at once," said Edmund, rising from his chair.

"If she will have you!" said Mrs. Creighton, with a contemptuous laugh. "And I should advise you to inquire very closely into her relations with Mr. Francis Moor before you ask her to become your wife."

Edmund's grey eye sent out a spark of fire. He stopped short as he was leaving the room, and looked steadily at his mother.

"If you say things of that sort," he said, "you need not expect that you will ever see me in this house again."

Then he turned and went out, with a not altogether disagreeable sense of warmth at his heart. It was something new for him to strike a blow in defence of the absent—even of those he liked. It generally seemed wiser to hold one's tongue. But now he had spoken strongly on Alys's behalf, he loved her the more for it and respected himself for the strength of his affection.

He did not, however, go north at once. He wrote to Lisbeth asking for details about Alys, and received a letter from the doctor in return. Lisbeth was too much occupied to write. Edmund knitted his brows over the doctor's report, and debated within himself whether he might not venture to send a specialist down to London; but finally he decided to wait. And when he had another letter, he received an account of such improvement in Alys's health that he de-

cided to wait a little longer. When she could receive visitors he would go.

But before he had the expected letter from the doctor, giving him permission to see her, he had a few lines from Alys herself. They made his heart beat faster than it had done for years.

"Dear Edmund," the letter ran,—"will you come and see me? I have something very important to say. "ALYS."

He went by the night train. And all through the journey his mind was occupied, partly by the thought of Alys, and partly by a consideration that was suggested to him by the *Westminster Gazette.*

The knife which had been found in Zadock's side—to whom had it belonged? The question of murderous intent seemed to be hanging in the air, although nobody breathed the words. Had it belonged to Zadock? Nobody was able to say whether Zadock possessed a knife of that kind or not.

It came back to Edmund's mind that he had passed an outhouse once in the dusk of a warm evening, and had seen Zadock bent upon the work of sharpening a knife. He had spoken to the man—spoken about the knife. And Zadock had said to him that he meant to kill the squire with it —that was Frank; and missy too—that was Alys; because they made Lisbeth cry.

"It's no business of mine," said Edmund to himself. "No doubt they have other witnesses. Of course, if they have not, a piece of evidence like this would mean something—it would certainly influence the verdict—but it won't be necessary. It would be an awful nuisance to have to give 'evidence for the accused.' Hang the fellow! I wish he *were* hanged. What business had he to come between Alys and me? I only hope Alys is tired of him by this time."

He reached Crosthwaite in the morning, and with his accustomed coolness went to the hotel, had a bath and breakfast, smoked and looked at the newspaper before walking up to Quest. "No use in getting there too early," he

said to himself. "Alys won't be ready for visitors till the middle of the day."

It was more than the middle of the day—it was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon by the time he arrived at Quest.

He had telegraphed that he was coming, and they were expecting him. The servant showed him at once into the sitting-room. Lisbeth did not appear. She had had a premonition of what was about to happen ever since Alys told her that she had written to Edmund Creighton.

The broad, comfortable couch was drawn up near the fire, and upon it, wrapped in shawls, lay the girl whom Edmund intended to make his wife. But how changed she was! The colour had left her cheeks: even her lips were colourless: her great blue eyes looked too large for her face; the veins showed upon her temples and in her thin white hands. But when Edmund appeared, she raised herself a little, and held out her hand to him, with a little cry.

"Oh, you have come! You have come! I am so glad! Edmund, take me away!"

It was all that he had hoped to hear, he was wildly glad and triumphant, for not only his love but his vanity was satisfied; but he did not betray any exuberance of joy. He felt that any buoyant utterance would distress her—shock her even; he must keep very calm, very quiet, if he wanted to make her his own. He held her hand in both his own for a minute or two, then drew a chair close to the couch and sat down.

"My poor little girl!" he said, tenderly. "So this is what they have made of you? Did I not tell you that they would kill you between them?"

"Oh, Edmund, all that you said was true. It is a dreadful place. They are all fierce, savage, rough—even he——"

"Yes, yes, I understand. I never thought him worthy of you. If it had been a better man, I could more easily have given you up."

"Have you not given me up?" said Alys, timidly, as if fearing a rebuff.

"Should I have come if I had?"

"Ah! You said I might always say 'Come.' And I did—because I must get away from here."

"You shall get away, my sweet. You shall go to the sunny south—the land of birds and flowers and brightness, where you ought to be. We will go together, will we not?"

He stroked her hand caressingly as he put the question. But casually, and even carelessly, as it seemed to be asked, he had an intention behind it. He wanted to know whether she was really prepared to marry him, or whether she had only a vague idea of travelling under his convoy to some house where she could be nursed back to health and strength, in order to marry that other man some other day. He must ascertain this before he went any farther.

She looked scared at once, and drew her hand away.

"I don't know," she said, piteously. "I don't believe I can ever love—anybody—again."

"So long as you don't love anybody else better than me, I do not mind," said Edmund.

"Even if I do not care—even for you?"

"But you do care—a little," he answered, smiling confidently into her eyes.

"A very little."

"That is enough."

"But you will take me away, Edmund; you will take me away from Quest? It is killing me; I cannot stay here all the winter—I shall die, as you said I should."

"My bird, my flower, you shall never see winter again if I can help it," he murmured softly. He had slipped down to his knees, and had gathered her in his arms. She leaned against his shoulder, and shed some tears—half of weakness, half of relief.

"Oh, Edmund, ought I? Does it not seem—cruel, to abandon *him*—when he is in trouble?"

She dared put the question when she was sure of the reply.

"My darling, do you think I could bear to see you link

your life with that of a murderer? I feel as if I would rather you died first."

"I would rather die first, too," said Alys, helplessly. "Oh, it is so dreadful! Think of being mixed up with a trial—of having your name in the papers—and talked about by everybody. I want to get away from it all. Oh, perhaps it was not Frank's fault—but I can't bear to think of him now. *You* would never be cruel to any one, would you, Edmund?"

She was trembling so violently that he felt obliged to kiss and caress her in order to soothe her into quietness again. She accepted his kisses passively, and yet with a certain pleasure. It was natural to her to be petted and comforted like a child.

Lisbeth looked in once, and immediately withdrew. One brief glance told her all.

She went upstairs again, and looked out of the window at the wind-swept fellside and the darkening grey sky. She thought of the two men she had loved—one lay in the churchyard, and one in Crossbury Gaol. And Alys had deserted the man who still was dearer to Lisbeth than her life.

"Does nobody in the world know how to love but me?" said Lisbeth to herself, with bitterness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRIAL.

EDMUND quoted several proverbs to himself that night, such as those about "not letting the grass grow under one's feet," "making hay while the sun shone," and "taking the bull by the horns." The bull, in this case, meant Lisbeth.

When Alys had gone to her room, for she was too weak to sit up for very long, he attacked Miss Verrall at once. He was a little afraid of Lisbeth. She was too tall, too strong,

too capable for him. In his heart he called her "unwomanly." But he was inclined to like her more than usual just now, because of the traces of trouble in her face—she could not hide the fading of her colour or the dark shadows below her troubled eyes. He almost fancied that he could discern a silver line in the sombre cloud of her dark hair.

Nevertheless, he was nervous, as he looked at her after tea, and resolved to speak his mind. There was something stern in her air, something of a masculine strength upon her brow. He stood up and grasped the back of a chair, which he rocked backward and forward as he spoke.

"I particularly wish to have a word with you, Miss Verrall," he said.

"Yes, so I thought," Lisbeth replied. She took up her knitting, and plied the needles vigorously.

This was disagreeable. Edmund was not used to such brusque replies, nor to women who knitted when he talked. He looked at Lisbeth with speechless distaste.

"Alys has spoken to you, I suppose?" he said at last.

"Alys has said nothing. But I happen to have eyes in my head."

She spoke with positive temper. Mr. Creighton was a little shocked, and adopted a colder tone.

"Then, I need hardly say, you will not be surprised. Your sister and I have known each other for some time, and I am sincerely attached to her. I am happy to say that she has consented to be my wife."

No answer. Lisbeth bent her head over her work, and knitted savagely.

"I think," said Edmund, raising his voice a little, and letting the chair go down to the floor again, "that Quest is an unsuitable place for her—in winter. She is too delicate to stand the severe cold, or the strain of such incidents as have lately occurred. I propose, Miss Verrall, to make her my wife at once, and take her away."

Then Lisbeth stopped knitting. Her dark eyes blazed up at him fiercely.

"*At once?*" she repeated, with terrible emphasis on the words.

"Yes, at once. As soon as I can get a special licence. Within the week," said Edmund.

"Does Alys consent?"

"I have not put it to her in so many words, but I believe she will."

"Then, I do *not* believe it," said Lisbeth, with cold, cutting scorn in every word. "Alys is not so base—so cruel—as you would make her out. She will *not* consent to marry you while Francis Moor's fate hangs in the balance—it would be a heartless thing to do."

"My dear Miss Verrall," said Edmund, quietly, "do you suppose that she cares what becomes of Francis Moor at all?"

Lisbeth looked at him silently. The blood rushed to her cheeks and temples in a violent tide of crimson, then retreated, leaving her white as death. He wondered why she changed colour so quickly; but he did not know that his question had seemed to her almost an insult to Alys herself.

"Perhaps I ought not to tell you," she said, in a low voice, "but you ought not to marry Alys in ignorance. She and Frank Moor——"

"Oh, excuse me, I know all about that," said Edmund, with an airy laugh. "Alys is a simple, truthful little thing; she told me long ago. A mere boy and girl attachment, fortunately for me; not the sort of thing that lasts. It is all over now."

"All over!" said Lisbeth, fixing her eyes upon him "and Frank is in prison still?"

"My good woman," said Edmund—he would have said "my dear lady" had Lisbeth been a little higher in the social scale—"what has Alys to do with that?"

Lisbeth put her knitting on the table, folded her hands, and turned her face away. She felt rather sick. To think that Frank was no more than this to the girl whom he had loved was a great shock to her.

"The fact is," said Edmund decidedly, "that Alys is extremely unwell. She ought not to stay another day in this

part of the world. I propose that we should be married as soon as possible, then that I should take her for a short time to Bournemouth or some other southern watering-place, from which she could come to Crossbury, if necessary, for a day or two during the course of the trial. When that is over I shall at once take her abroad."

"Very well," said Lisbeth, calmly. "Now I understand. There is only this to be said. I shall not countenance any such marriage before the trial. It would be, to my thinking, a terrible insult to Mr. Moor. A most painful and unnecessary piece of cruelty. The trial is only three weeks off. She can wait surely for the end of that."

"I cannot wait," said Edmund.

"If you want her, you must come back for her. She will not marry you now if she has any regard for me."

"And, pray, why not?" A sneer curled his thin lips. "Mr. Moor's feelings seem very dear to you."

"I have known Mr. Moor and his mother all my life," said Lisbeth. "Mischief has come to them already through those that live at Quest, and I will not give either of them an additional grief to bear if I can help it. If Alys goes away and marries you before the trial, she need never come back to Quest. I should think it a wanton insult to a man who had perilled his life and his honour in her defence."

Edmund shrugged his shoulders. "You think you are unanswerable, Miss Verrall. May I ask you whether Mr. Moor would not have defended himself against the attack of that poor lunatic if Alys had not been there? You are taking an absurd and impracticable view of the affair."

"I cannot help it," said Lisbeth, steadily. "I know how he loved her—loves her still, and I thought Alys loved him too. I call it a piece of positive indecency for her to marry another man before he has been declared innocent or guilty, and I will not give any such marriage my sanction. If she wants to marry you so soon, I shall tell her to leave my house to-morrow. It shall not be done—with my consent."

She carried her point. After a good deal more argument, Edmund had the wit to see that she was impregnable; and

as he did not wish to make a scandal, or to remove Alys at once from Quest, he was obliged to give way. But he owed Lisbeth a grudge henceforth.

"Gad, I believe she's in love with the fellow herself," he said, as he trod the path that led to the Crosthwaite Arms. "I'll drop a hint in the right quarter, I think, and let her have a little bullying at the trial. She is just the woman to fly into a rage at some of the questions that could be asked. . . . I wonder what her real motive is for wanting to delay the marriage till after the trial." It hardly occurred to him that she could have no other motive than the desire to save Frank pain. "I suppose she thinks he'll be acquitted, and that Alys will turn to him again. Is that possible? If I thought it were, I would move heaven and earth to get the fellow condemned. How about that knife, I wonder?"

And his mind turned once more towards the vision of Zadock with a ghastly grin upon his face, and a gleaming, murderous-looking knife within his hand.

He had a private interview with a solicitor in Crossbury before he went back to London, and congratulated himself on having given that gentleman a perfectly novel idea.

Alys wept a good deal when Lisbeth told her in a few succinct words what she thought of Edmund's proposition; but she yielded, on condition that she should be married as soon after the trial as possible, and that Lisbeth would not make any active opposition to her choice. Also, that Edmund should come back before the trial took place, and be present in Court while she gave her evidence.

The case had excited great interest in the county; for, although Frank was not personally well known or very popular, he belonged to an old family, and his mother had always been liked and respected. Lord Raynflete himself, whose secretary he was to have been, came forward to assure him that the post would still be open to him as soon as he was free to take it: and many other gentlemen testified their belief in his innocence. Unfortunately for Frank, there was a strong feeling against him in the town from which the jurors were taken: they thought that it was a case of a

gentleman ill-treating a poor man, chiefly because he was poor, and they murmured to themselves that it was time these gentlemen were taught the lesson that they could not knock poor people about just as they chose. The Court was crowded on the day when the trial began, and a whole posse of London reporters were present, as well as numberless artists to sketch the faces of prisoner and counsel and witnesses alike.

Frank looked pale and worn, but was perfectly composed. The first part of the evidence was given by doctors, servants and labourers, and related to the finding of the body, medical details, and matters of that sort. There was no great interest felt until the chief witness (as she was felt to be) was called, and Alys Lorimer came into the witness-box.

Frank started and turned eagerly towards her as she appeared. He was mistaken if he thought that she would look at him: she did not turn her eyes his way at all. She was looking very pale, but more self-possessed than her friends had expected her to be. Edmund was near her in Court; and once, Frank noticed with a jealous pang, he smiled at her encouragingly. What right had he to smile at her? Did she not, after all, belong to him, and to him alone? He was soon to be disabused upon this point.

Alys told her story, in answer to skilfully managed questions, with a clearness and conciseness which she owed in part to Edmund, who had taken care to drill her a little as to her manner of speech. She did not show any feeling or prepossession either way, until it came to the cross-examination; and then a certain bias gradually revealed itself.

"Was the prisoner merely defending himself?" she was asked. "I mean"—as Alys looked perplexed—"was he warding off blows, or returning them?"

"He was returning them," said Alys, readily.

"Did you see a knife in his hand?"

"I saw a knife—I don't know whether it was his or not."

"Was it in Zadock Verrall's hand, do you think?"

"It might have been."

"You are not sure?"

"No, I am not sure."

"It might"—insinuatingly—"have been in the prisoner's hand?"

"I think"—she spoke faintly—"it might."

Frank turned and looked at her. There was agony in his eyes. Oh, surely she knew that *he* had never used a knife—that it was Zadock who had rushed forward with it in his hand! Was it possible that she should not know?

"Was it your impression that the prisoner had lost his temper?"

"I don't know—I think so. Perhaps he could not help it," said Alys, naïvely.

"Did it not look so to you?" asked the lawyer significantly. He knew pretty well the answer that he would provoke. Even yet it was a subject over which Alys invariably lost her self-control.

"Oh, it was terrible!" she cried, forgetting the listeners, forgetting the Court, forgetting Frank himself. "I never saw anything so dreadful before. I thought they would both be killed."

"But you do not think that the prisoner—Mr. Moor—is the sort of man who would unnecessarily commit violence, I suppose?" said the counsel, smoothly.

Dead silence. Alys hung her head. Some one interposed, and the question was not pressed. It was observed that Frank Moor suddenly turned very pale.

"Look at the prisoner. You were walking by the tarn with him, you say?"

"Yes."

The eyes met for the first time since the lovers had kissed each other on the bank above the tarn. There was heart-broken despair in Frank's expression: there was fear and repugnance in every line of Alys's face.

"You were engaged to him then?"

"Yes. I suppose so."

"You are engaged to him now?"

"Oh, no, *no, no!*"

"I think that is all I need ask you, Miss Lorimer," said the lawyer, slipping back into his seat with a smile. Her repudiation of an engagement had been the most damaging thing to Frank that he could have desired; and as he quite persuaded himself of Frank's guilty motives and desire to get rid of Zadock, he was rather pleased with himself for having brought her to this admission.

Later in the day Lisbeth Verrall was called—chiefly as a matter of form, and to give evidence about the finding of Zadock's body, and the time at which Frank and Alys started together from Quest. She was questioned about the mysterious knife which had been found in Zadock's side; but she knew nothing of it. Perhaps only Edmund Creighton could have actually declared with certainty that that knife had been in Zadock's possession some days before his death. And Edmund Creighton sat quietly in the Court and held his tongue.

"You have known the prisoner a long time, I believe?" some one was saying to Lisbeth.

"Almost all my life."

"You were on friendly terms with him?"

"I was. We have always been proud of the friendship of the Moors of Moor End."

There was a ring in Lisbeth's voice which made everybody look up. This was no shrinking, frightened witness, like Alys Lorimer: this was a woman who positively wanted to have her say.

"Was the prisoner on friendly terms with Zadock Verrall?"

"Yes, generally. He was very kind to him."

"But lately, that was not so, was it?"

"Mr. Moor was always kind to Zadock: but lately Zadock took a dislike to him."

"Now, what was that for?"

"He took fancies sometimes."

"And what was this particular fancy?"

Lisbeth set her teeth. "He thought I was vexed at seeing Mr. Moor and my sister so much together."

"And you *were* vexed—perhaps."

"Yes—I thought it unsuitable."

"You were not vexed on your own account?"

Lisbeth looked annoyed. "I do not understand you," she said, simply.

"Is it not a fact that Mr. Moor once paid some attention to yourself?"

"Yes," said Lisbeth, quietly, "that is a fact."

"Perhaps you—unintentionally—suggested to your—your cousin—no, uncle, was it not?—that he should punish Mr. Moor for his unfaithfulness?"

"Certainly not," said Lisbeth, with decision. "I had too great a regard for Mr. Moor to think of such a thing."

"A regard? An affection, in fact?"

There was a breathless stillness in the Court for a moment or two, while Lisbeth hesitated. Then she lifted up her face, with a light upon it such as few had ever seen before.

"I had a great affection for Mr. Moor, and I have it still," she said. "I believe him to be one of the gentlest and best men that ever trod the face of the earth, and that he would have willingly died to save me or mine from injury."

They did not ask Lisbeth any more questions. She looked at Frank before he left the box, and her eyes were brimming with love that knew no bounds.

"That first girl did her best to hang him," said one reporter to another. "But the second one has turned the scale."

"Has she?" said his friend. "They can't hang for manslaughter, of course. But she won't get him off altogether."

"No; but there'll be a light sentence," said the first.

Was it light? Lisbeth did not think so, when she heard what the judge and jury had to say.

"Guilty of manslaughter, but recommended to mercy," rang in her ears for days.

Sentence: two years' imprisonment, with hard labour. To Francis Moor it seemed worse than death.

CHAPTER XXV.

HIS WIFE.

Alys, shrinking and cowering in the carriage which conveyed her and Lisbeth back to Quest from the Crosthwaite Station after the trial, would willingly have been anywhere else. In the railway compartment she had been supported by Edmund's presence, but Edmund had taken leave of them at the station, and she was obliged to drive up to Quest with her stepsister. Lisbeth had not spoken to her since they left the Court. Alys had turned faint, and then become hysterical, and Lisbeth had tended her as carefully and gently as possible; but she had not said a word, and her face had been curiously white and set. She had not heard Alys's evidence given, but she knew from others of its general tenor, and she did not feel tenderly towards the girl.

She was herself too reticent and self-contained to see that her silence might be the severest condemnation. She was almost startled when Alys suddenly touched her knee with a shaking hand, and cried out—

"Oh, Lisbeth, do speak to me!"

Lisbeth turned and looked at her. "I have nothing to say," she answered, hardly knowing the coldness of her tone.

"You are angry with me. . . . Yet what could I do? . . . I could not say anything but the truth—as I knew it——"

"No, I suppose not. And yet," said Lisbeth, turning away her face, "no woman would have spoken as you did, if she had loved a man."

"I don't love him," said Alys, quivering. "I can't!"

Lisbeth said nothing. It was difficult to speak while the carriage was passing along the stony road, and even more

difficult to know what to say. She would willingly have deferred the subject for ever. A great gulf seemed to have opened between herself and Alys; the sisters were separated now, as neither distance nor prejudice had ever separated them before.

But when they were in the house, it was Alys, timid as she usually was, who reopened the conversation. She seemed to have a feverish desire to make her position clear.

"You blame me," she said, with sudden passion, "and I don't see why."

"I have not said I blamed you."

"You look it. I feel it. You are not kind to me."

"Oh, what does it matter," cried Lisbeth, desolately, "whether I am kind or not? If you have done what you think right, the matter is over for you. I can only think of *him*—alone and miserable, and knowing that you do not care——"

She stopped short, seated herself, and rested her face on her hands, her elbows on her knees. Alys watched her with stupefaction; it was seldom that Lisbeth was seen to cry, but she was crying now.

She drew closer to her sister, and finally knelt down beside her, the tears flowing over her pale cheeks too.

"You loved him," she said at last, very softly.

"I love him still. I do not change."

"I cannot help it," Alys moaned. "I wish—I wish *I* did not change. But I can't help it. I loved him once—but now——"

"You *never* loved him," said Lisbeth, sternly, lifting a tear-stained face from her hands. "Never! never! If you had loved him at all, you would not have forsaken him in the time of his sorrow."

Alys shrank away. "I can't help it. I am very sorry—very sorry for him, but I cannot care for him in the way I used to do. It is all so dreadful—so different! He is not the same to me."

Lisbeth gazed at her with searching, uncomprehending eyes. She could not understand Alys's nature: its want of

depth was more bewildering to her than any other manifestation could have been. For Frank's sake, she even condescended to argue, to implore.

"But don't you see," she said, "that it was an accident, such as might have happened to any man? In the eye of the law he may seem guilty, but we know that he is not guilty in the eye of God! Is that nothing? I thought it was for us who loved him to uphold him, and show our trust in him before the whole world. Oh, it is very hard on him if those he loves best do not take him for what he is, and not for what he seems to the outside world."

"I cannot help it," said Alys, with a kind of doggedness which seemed incongruous with her gentle face and fragile form. "I cannot help it. I shall never be able to forget how I saw him struggling with Zadock—lifting his hand to strike him—pushing him backward into the tarn. You professed to love Zadock. I cannot understand how you defend his—murderer."

"You know as well as I do that Frank never had a murderous thought," said Lisbeth, bitterly. "But it is no use talking—you do not love him—you never loved him, and I should be glad of that if it were not for *his* pain; but do you never think how *he* must suffer—how he must be suffering now?"

Alys uttered a little cry, and hid her face. "I know," she said, "and I can't help it. I wish I could. If I could love him, I would. But I can't—indeed, I can't." And she shuddered and cried like a frightened child.

Lisbeth looked at her and drew a long breath. Then she seemed to give up the contest. Her face changed and softened, while it retained its expression of unutterable sadness, and, after a pause, she touched Alys's fair head with her hand, and said, mournfully, but not unkindly—

"I see—it is no use talking about it. We are different—you and I. He must forget you, and you must forget him."

"I must go away," said Alys, looking up eagerly. "You won't think it unkind of me if I go away, Lisbeth?"

"No; it would be best. But where will you go?"

"I don't know—I don't care. Anywhere—away from here: out of sight of those dreadful hills."

Even in the midst of Lisbeth's deep-seated sorrow, the slighting reference to her beloved hills hurt and vexed her a little. To her mind, there was nothing so beautiful in all the world as the bare hill-sides which she looked on every day. But Alys, as she had said, was "different"; and Lisbeth, forbearingly, made no reply.

They did not continue the conversation. Alys was worn out and went to bed; Lisbeth sat up half the night, with hands clasped tightly before her and eyes fixed upon the fire, trying to read the riddle of her life aright, and—an even more difficult task—the riddle of other lives besides her own. She gave it up at last as an impossible proceeding; but even when she had lain down in her bed, she lay awake, her eyes wide open, her imagination busy in the darkness with pictures of Frank in his lonely cell, of Alys and herself living side by side, but divided for ever in heart and mind by the love of one, the hatred of the other. Life seemed dreary to Lisbeth in those dark midnight hours.

She was not surprised to hear next morning that Mr. Creighton had called to see Miss Lorimer. It was only natural that Alys should turn in her distress to old friends. Yet, as she went about her work, she was conscious of a shrinking dread of the things that she fancied Alys must be saying to Mr. Creighton about Frank. It seemed to her as though she *knew*—although she could not hear with her bodily ears—that they were speaking of him in ways that it hurt her to think of, hurt her to suspect.

She was probably right. Neither Alys nor Edmund had much conception of the cruelty of their own judgment, nor of the coldness of their own hearts. Edmund prided himself on his clear sense of justice: Alys on her sensitive nature, on her fastidious delicacy and refinement. And, of course, their conclusions were not such as would have soothed or pleased the loyal, loving, steadfast woman who reigned as mistress of Quest.

Edmund went forward eagerly to meet Alys, and bowed over her hand with almost exaggerated respect. She was very pale, very subdued—to his mind, more beautiful, more interesting than ever. Her eyes looked at him pathetically: he felt a thrill of increased affection, of renewed fervour, as he met their glance. He led her to her seat, and arranged the cushions at her back as deferentially as if she had been a princess. And yet, all the time he was conscious of acting King Cophetua to the beggar maid!

"You must be tired: you must be worn out," he said, gently. "I am almost surprised to find you downstairs at all."

"I could not rest. And I thought—I hoped—to see you."

"Ah, I am glad that you think of me as a friend."

"If I had not you, I do not know what other I should have," said Alys, the tears filling her blue eyes.

"Your stepsister," he began, a little dubiously; but Alys interrupted him at once.

"She is angry with me, vexed, pained, disappointed. We can never be friends again."

Edmund looked at her keenly. "You do not mean," he said, as if he could not believe his ears, "that she wants you to think yourself still bound to that man!"

"Indeed she does," said Alys, covering her face. "She thinks I am false, fickle, everything that is base and mean. And I cannot help it—indeed, I cannot. I would have been true to him if I could!"

"Of course, but the thing has become impossible," said Edmund, in his cool, matter-of-fact tone. "You could not care any longer for a man who behaved so brutally to another, and who has just narrowly escaped hanging! It is absurd to think of such a thing!"

"You really think so, Edmund? You don't call me cowardly and false, do you?"

"What a question, Alys! It is a sheer impossibility for a good, sweet, gentle woman like yourself to love a man who has proved himself such a ruffian. And a convict, too! Would you like to be a convict's wife, I wonder?"

"A convict's wife! A *convict!* Oh, Edmund, how terrible!"

"You should be thankful that you found out that man's character before it was too late. Suppose that all this had happened *after* you married him."

Alys shrank back; there was a look of positive horror upon her face.

"I suppose it would have been my duty then to be true to him," she said, faintly.

"But it is not your duty now. Courage, Alys! Your duty is to free yourself determinedly from any shadow of a bond to that wretched man in gaol."

"I wish I could! I don't know how."

"Why? What binds you to him?"

"I don't know," said Alys, in a tone of deep distress. "But Lisbeth—Lisbeth——"

She got no further, and Edmund waxed impatient, or thought it well to seem so.

"Lisbeth! Lisbeth indeed! My dear Alys, let me tell you this: if your sister reproaches you for not being true to him, as I suppose she calls it, she does so only because she wishes herself in your place."

"What do you mean?" said Alys, her eyes growing large with surprise.

"You did not hear her give her evidence at the trial. I did. It was as plain as possible that she was in love with him."

"In love with Francis Moor? Oh, Edmund, no!"

"Oh, Alys, yes! She almost said so. She did say she loved him—is it not much the same thing? and she said it in such a way that no doubt was left on other people's minds as to what she meant. I heard it discussed last night, wherever I went, with considerable freedom; it is common talk."

"But he—he was not in love with her."

"I have been making inquiries, Alys, and I find that on all hands it is believed that he *was*—or professed to be—in love with her long before you came upon the scene. How

far the affair went is not exactly known to the world; but it seems pretty certain that he would never have married her."

"Did he—care—for her?"

The words came out tremblingly: it almost seemed as though the girl's jealousy had been aroused and her dying love revived. Edmund hastened to put the matter in the light which he knew would seem worst to her.

"I don't suppose he cared particularly. He is the sort of man that must always be making love. You were only one of many, I am afraid, dear. There were others besides Miss Verrall."

"Oh!" said Alys, with a little cry of pain, and then she covered her face with her hands, and lay back on her chair, while Edmund Creighton watched the tears trickle from between her slender fingers, and felt no pang of compunction at the sight.

When she had wept for some few minutes, however, he thought it time to interfere.

"Would it not be better," he said, softly, "to forget the existence of that wretched man altogether? He was always utterly unworthy of you, and now you know it! I would never think of him again!"

"I shall be obliged to remember him," murmured Alys, "so long as I stay here."

Edmund's eye flashed. He drew nearer, and put his hand on the arm of her chair.

"Don't stay here, then."

"I have nowhere else to go."

"Oh, yes, you have, Alys. My home is ready for you. My heart is ready. You have only to fly there, and you will be at rest, you poor little tired bird!"

He drew her hand into his, and fondled it. She submitted uncomplainingly, with a dawning look of quietness upon her face.

"Alys," he said, "Alys—my darling—you will come with me?"

His words seemed to break the spell that enfolded her. She drew her hand away, and hid her face again.

"Oh, I can't! I can't! It is so soon! What would Lisbeth say?"

And then Edmund knew that his cause was as good as won.

Kneeling down beside her, and taking her hand once more in his own, he used all the powers of his practised speech to persuade her that her best course was to give herself to him, to marry him at once. What Lisbeth thought or said mattered very little—would matter not at all when once Alys was his wife.

"And otherwise," he said, "what will become of you, my darling? I cannot go away and leave you to bear all the cold and discomfort of the year. You will have dark looks from your step-sister." Alys tried to contradict this statement, but he would not hear. "No one will be kind and loving to you: you will have a drearier time than I can even bear to picture. Don't give yourself that unnecessary suffering, sweet one: promise that you will be mine, and I shall be content."

And so at last she promised, as he had known for some time that she would.

"But it cannot be at once," she protested, after a time.

"I do not see any reason why it should not be to-morrow."

"Oh, Edmund! It would not look well."

"It would look as well as it possibly could," Edmund averred, cheerfully. "It would be a capital answer to the people who are pitying you now, Alys, for your position. There *are* people, dear, who pity you—yes, *pity* you, with the pity that is akin to scorn, and I want you to show these people how utterly they are mistaken. When they hear that you have married me, instead of breaking your heart for a man who was utterly unworthy of you, they will respect, not pity, you. And I want my wife to hold her own against the world."

But on this point Alys could not be quite convinced. All that she would do was to promise that she would become his wife before the summer was over; but she declared that she could not yet say when. He forebore to press her, for he saw

that he had gone far enough; and he believed that she should ultimately have her way.

When he had gone back to the inn, and Lisbeth came into the room with the dainty lunch which she had prepared with her own hands for Alys, she was amazed to find the girl flushed, excited, with shining eyes, and a curious look of repressed triumph and determination upon her face.

"You have talked too much. I thought that Mr. Creighton was here a long time," said Lisbeth, with motherly anxiety.

"Oh no, I am not tired. It has done me good."

"Did he bring any news?"

"News? No, none."

"I though, perhaps, he had something special to say—he stayed so long."

"He had something special to say," Alys answered, almost defiantly. "I may as well tell you now as later: he came to ask me to be his wife."

Lisbeth turned and looked at her. "What did you say?" she asked, in a choking voice.

"I told him that I would—before the summer was out."

Then Lisbeth threw up her hands, with a gesture of despairing appeal against the hardness of her sister's tone.

"May God forgive you, then, Alys Lorimer!" she cried; "for you will have broken Frank Moor's heart."

"And what is that to me?" said Alys, with a coldness which perhaps she did not feel.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART."

One interview. One last miserable half-hour before the prison wall closed round him entirely, and he was practically lost to life and hope for a space of weary months and years. Lisbeth was too unhappy to take comfort even from

the thought that she was once more in the presence of the man she loved.

He was haggard and pale; but he looked at her with a brave smile, and thanked her for her visit.

"It was good of you to come," he said. "I hardly expected it."

"You did not expect that I should desert you in your trouble, did you?" said Lisbeth, in a low voice.

"I don't know—people are so different," he said, hesitatingly. "My mother has not given me up—but——"

He came to a full stop, and Lisbeth knew that he thought of Alys.

"Tell me of *her*," he broke out impetuously. "Is she well?"

"Yes."

"All this has been a great strain on her, no doubt. She is so delicate. Has she been ill?"

"No."

"Why do you answer in monosyllables, Lisbeth? What is the matter? What is wrong?"

"I do not know that I can say that anything is exactly wrong. Only—I suppose you know—that Alys——"

"She has given me up. I knew that, from the way she gave her evidence. There is something else. Be quick, Lisbeth!"

"She wanted me to tell you," said Lisbeth, in trembling accents. "But I said I did not know how. She never loved you, Frank, or she would not have changed so completely—have promised another so soon——"

Frank's face suddenly grew white. "Already? She has promised to marry another man?"

"Yes. Mr. Creighton."

"Ah!" He let his face fall upon his hands, and remained silent for a little time: when he looked up again, it was grey with a dull despair.

"It does seem almost impossible, does it not?" he said, with a strange low laugh, which was almost a sob, and brought the tears into Lisbeth's eyes. "I can hardly be-

lieve it. Perhaps she does not know her own mind—perhaps she will change again."

"I do not think so."

He turned his face away, and sat very still. Lisbeth reached out her hand, and laid it on his arm in token of sympathy.

"Thank you," he said, by and by, in a tone that was barely audible. "You are very good to me, Lisbeth. I seem to have lost all feeling for myself just now: I am neither glad nor sorry for anything that happens."

"That will pass off."

"Well, I am not anxious for it to pass off. It will be a wretched time for me, I suppose, when it does. Two years!"

"You will remember," said Lisbeth, quietly, "that there are friends waiting to welcome you when you come out? You will not forget us?"

He looked at her, and was silent for a minute or two. "My life in England will be ended when I come out again," he said.

"Only to begin somewhere else."

"Yes—somewhere else." There was a suggestiveness in the tone that made Lisbeth's blood run cold.

"Frank, promise me that you will come back to your mother, and once, at least, to Quest."

He hesitated: she saw that he had some difficulty in giving her his word. All the more earnestly she pleaded for it. A promise of that kind might make a great difference to him when he had to face the world once more.

"I cannot refuse you anything," he said to her at last, in a saddened tone. "Yes, Lisbeth, I promise. I will come back—once, at any rate, to Quest."

Then there was a silence, during which time he looked absently at the wall, as if absorbed in thought, and Lisbeth stealthily coned every lineament of the worn, melancholy face, as if she wanted to know it thoroughly by heart.

"I wanted to thank you," he said, when the silence had lasted a little time, "for the kind way in which you spoke of

me in court. I am told that it made a great deal of difference. . . . I am much obliged to you."

Lisbeth's face grew hot. She was under the impression that her words had formed an unmistakable confession of love, such as nobody could mistake; and she did not know that it had sounded to Frank only like a tender and touching acknowledgment of past friendship.

"I thought," he went on, "that you would have given me up—that you would never say again that we were friends; but you do not so readily dispose of the old ties, do you, Lisbeth? As my mother says, you, at least, are true as steel."

"Does Lady Adela say that?"

"Indeed she does. She will thank you herself some day. You know—as I do—Lisbeth, that I would never have hurt that poor fellow Zadock if I could have helped it! It was all a matter of self-defence—although it ended so unhappily."

"I never blamed you, Frank."

"God bless you, Lisbeth, for saying so."

Then their hands met in a long, close clasp, and for a moment they looked into each other's eyes. Francis Moor, absorbed in his own sorrow, in the ruin and disgrace of his life, had not hitherto given any great attention to Lisbeth's appearance or demeanour. It suddenly struck him now, in a vague, tentative fashion, that her face was different, that her eyes looked as if she had known sorrow too. There was deep, passionate, yearning pain in those beautiful dark eyes of hers—a pain that haunted him at times long afterwards in the silent hours of the night—but which did not of itself reveal to him the love that gave it birth.

The short visit was soon concluded. Lisbeth bade him farewell with such calmness as she had at her command: but in spite of her dislike to tears, they fell over her cheeks one by one as she rose up to go. Frank was less affected than she was. He looked at her with a dull envy of her tears. "Ah, you can cry," he said. "If I were a little less miserable I almost think I should cry too."

Somehow the words stopped Lisbeth's tears.

She went back to Quest, feeling that nobody in the whole wide world could be more miserable than herself.

She was not in charity with Alys. There was a sort of bitter contempt in her mind for the girl that could not be true to her lover in the hour of adversity. She wished with all her heart and soul that she had never tried to find her sister out, never been kind to her, never invited her to Quest.

Nevertheless, she tried to be just and generous. It was plain that Alys was not of the stuff of which heroines are made. Well, was it her fault? And was it not better that her weakness should be discovered now, rather than in the days after marriage, when she could not rid herself of Frank so easily? Even had the course of her love run pretty smooth, Lisbeth knew that she would have had a good deal to put up with as Frank's wife; and perhaps the trial would have been too much for her. There would have been the difficulty of getting on with Lady Adela, whose disappointment at her son's choice could not have been concealed: there would be the bugbear of comparative poverty; and last, but not least, there would have been Frank's dreamy, unpractical, melancholic temperament, which was not of the kind, perhaps, to bring happiness to the heart of a delicate and sensitive girl. Lisbeth acknowledged all this to herself, and then sighed. If only the rupture had been brought about in a less tragic and sinister way!

Looking out of her window, she saw that Edmund Creighton had come to the house again, and was standing at the door. In a moment or two she heard his steps in the passage, and knew that he had joined Alys in the parlour. A murmur of their voices penetrated to her ear, as she stood in the room above, and made her heart swell with anger. What business had they to flaunt their love-making under her very eyes? They must know—Alys at least must know—how intolerably painful it was to her. Alys must go away from Quest, if this was the way in which she was going to behave.

Then a sudden revulsion of feeling came over her. Her eyes filled with tears. "God forgive me!" she said to herself. "Why have I grown so selfish? Is *my* pain to be the first consideration in the world? She is my sister: I must do the best I can for her. Frank would not wish me to be unkind. Oh, I have grown very selfish, very hard, in the last few weeks; but it seems to me as if all my troubles came from the hands of those I love best, of those who are nearest to me. It is very hard to bear."

She sank into a chair and hid her face in her hands for a little while, with a sort of abandonment of herself to grief, which had not often occurred in Lisbeth's life. By and by she slid from the chair to the floor, and remained, silent and kneeling, for some time. She was going through one of those crises in life where the only peace and safety and strength lies in faith in an Unseen Guide, where the darkness and tumult on every side would daunt and destroy if the soul had no vision of a heavenly light.

Peace and strength came to her in some fashion, and enabled her to confront Alys later in the day with perfect gentleness, although of a grave and regretful kind. Alys looked at her wistfully, and did not seem to know how to respond. Lisbeth's coldness, since her engagement to Mr. Creighton, had weighed greatly upon the girl's spirits. Even Edmund's attempts at encouragement had failed to make her brave. By this time she looked so white and ill that Lisbeth's innate motherliness leaped up like a flame.

"My dear," she said, putting her hand gently on Alys's shoulder, "you don't look well. Is anything troubling you?"

The question hardly needed a reply. There was plenty to trouble her, as Alys thought; but she accepted it as an invitation to cast herself once more into Lisbeth's arms, and cry her heart out on Lisbeth's bosom.

"Poor little lass!" said Lisbeth, stroking the soft golden hair. "Poor, bonny little lass! We've all been in such trouble that I've half forgotten to look after thee. What's wrong, dearie?"

"Oh, Lisbeth, I thought you were never going to love me again!"

"I shall always love my little sister," said Lisbeth, slowly, but fervently, as if she were making a solemn vow of faithfulness. "I shall always do my best for her, and help her as far as I can. What is it now, Alys? Why do you seem so unhappy?"

"There are a great many reasons," said Alys, a little confusedly. Then, hiding her face again, she added: "Mr. Creighton is going back to London."

"I suppose he must go, sooner or later."

"Yes; but—I feel so lonely. Nobody here cares for me. And I am afraid."

"Afraid! What are you afraid of?" said Lisbeth, whose eyes had grown sombre, although her voice was gentle still.

She was prepared for any sort of self-blame and remorse. She expected to hear that Quest was too full of sad memories, perhaps that Alys had dreamt of Zadock, and fancied his ghost lying in wait for her at every corner. With any such dark, bizarre freak of the imagination Lisbeth would have sympathised. In the long dark evenings she herself had sometimes fancied that Zadock "walked." She would think more highly of Alys if she could believe that the girl was awake enough upon the spiritual side to feel these things.

But Alys's concern was for matters material.

"It is so cold here, Lisbeth," she said. "Edmund is afraid that I shall be ill if I stay. The winds are so keen; he says that they are keen enough to kill a delicate person in the spring."

Lisbeth felt herself silenced, repelled. After all the occurrences of the past few weeks, could Alys think of nothing but her own health? Perhaps, however, she reflected, this way of expressing herself was a blind: she did not want to say how painful the neighbourhood of Quest had become to her. It was curious that Lisbeth, who looked so much stronger and less sensitive than Alys, should have

the finer sense, the more delicate perception of the two; but it was the case.

"Now, when I have really a chance of happiness," said Alys, "it would be terrible to lose it—just through an east wind or a long spell of cold weather."

"But you could not lose it in that way, unless it were the will of God," said Lisbeth, simply.

"Oh," said Alys, shrinking a little, "you do put things so strangely, Lisbeth! Of course, I mean—speaking in the ordinary way—humanly speaking, as people say, that it is a risk for me to stay—that is all. And I feel afraid."

Lisbeth was silent for a minute or two, and looked at Alys with earnest, scrutinising gentleness. Then she said—

"Do you mean that Mr. Creighton wants you to marry him at once, Alys?"

"No, not quite at once," said Alys, colouring; "but in the summer time, when he is free, and we can go away. He wanted it to be at once, Lisbeth; but I thought it seemed so heartless—so unkind."

Lisbeth's lips moved, but she did not answer.

"I refused to let it be so soon," Alys continued—it was evident that she valued herself a little on account of the refusal—"and he is very much distressed—chiefly, of course, because of my health, as he says that this place is so much too cold for me."

"His mother will, perhaps, invite you there again," said Lisbeth, coldly.

"Oh, Lisbeth! I could not go there, when Mrs. Creighton behaved so unkindly to me——"

"Are there any other friends with whom you could go and stay?"

"None. Papa would not let me make friends. There is only you, Lisbeth."

"And my home," said Lisbeth, gravely, "is at Quest."

Alys's eyes filled with tears again. "I know," she said, in a tone of deep depression. "I know. But it is killing me."

"I will ask the doctor to look at you," said Lisbeth,

yielding a little at the girl's mournfulness of tone. "And we will see what he says. If Quest is really too cold for you——"

"Oh, Lisbeth, Edmund says it is a matter of life and death," cried Alys, eagerly.

"We shall see," Lisbeth answered; and shut her lips so tightly that Alys was not encouraged to say anything more.

Miss Verrall was not pleased with the part which Edmund Creighton seemed to be playing at present. So little was she pleased with it that she resolved at last to express her displeasure; and when she had disposed of Alys in bed that night—for Alys always went to rest early—she put on her long cloak and hood, took a lantern in her hand, and swung steadily down the dark road to the hotel at Crosthwaite where she knew that Edmund was staying.

Mr. Creighton was astonished and not particularly delighted to see her. He was sitting in a private parlour, reading a book: which was rather a surprise to Lisbeth, who expected to find him playing billiards, or standing in the bar, "like other young men." She had not fathomed the extent of Edmund's fastidiousness, or of his love for conventional respectability.

"What can I do for you, Miss Verrall?" he asked, politely.

"It is just this," said Lisbeth, refusing the offered seat, and facing him with the hood pushed back from her fine head, and her dark hair all blown about her eyes; "I want to know why you are frightening Alys about her health."

"I am not frightening her, I hope, more than is necessary. I sincerely want her to take care of herself."

"Quest is one of the healthiest places in the world."

"But also one of the coldest. Pardon me if I say that I do not think you understand the delicacy of Miss Lorimer's constitution. She is like an exotic plant, cultivated in the hot-house, and now thrust out into the wintry cold. Is it not likely that I should be anxious for the result?"

"I can take care of her," said Lisbeth, hotly.

Edmund bowed, with a little sarcasm in his smile.

"I do not want her to come to harm. I want to do what is right for her," said Lisbeth, her composure failing a little. "I wish she would marry you at once! Then *you* would have the responsibility."

"One which I should gladly adopt," he said, smoothly. "But Alys objects; she seems to think that you would consider it unnatural. So soon——"

"I should consider nothing unnatural now that she is engaged to you at all," said Lisbeth, who was always plain spoken. "I understood that her own feeling in the matter prevented her—a very right feeling, too."

"Oh, certainly. It is a pity that her right feelings are allowed to endanger her health, however," said Mr. Creighton, a little viciously. The two faced each other for a moment with a look of positive enmity. It was not the first time that they had felt themselves foes. But Lisbeth was the first to draw back.

"What can I do to prevent it?" she said.

"I am sure I hardly know," said Mr. Creighton, in his politest tones. Lisbeth could not help noticing that the lines of his face had grown sensibly harder and older in the last few weeks. The change seemed to be intensified, as he proceeded—"It would be an unpardonable insult, I suppose, if I suggested that I should be most happy to bear all expense if she were sent to the Riviera, or even to Bournemouth or Ventnor, for the rest of the winter."

"It would be an insult, indeed, when she has a sister who is perfectly well able and willing to do all for her that ought to be done," said Lisbeth, in a tone of deep indignation and offence.

Then the interview terminated, and each thought that it had been long enough. Lisbeth walked rapidly back to Quest, and Edmund absorbed himself once more in his book. But, although Lisbeth was very angry with him for the suggestion, yet it was one that bore fruit. It was owing to that speech, most probably, that, within ten days, Lisbeth and Alys were on their way to a six weeks' sojourn in the south of France.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. CREIGHTON'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER.

WHILE Alys and Lisbeth wandered from town to town in the sunny South, sometimes enjoying themselves, and sometimes only wondering why they did not, Julian Creighton was experiencing all the delights and all the disappointments and fatigues of a first London season.

Her sisters were out of the way. One was married, and gone abroad: the other refused to live at home, as she did not get on well with her mother. Mrs. Creighton had Julian, therefore, at her command, to mould and shape as well as she was able. Unfortunately, Julian did not lend herself well to being modelled on the pattern of other people; and if she had not been so very pretty, her mother would have been hard on her. As it was, she was beautiful in such a novel and striking way: she was so original, so innocently audacious, and yet, as everybody felt, so genuine and sincere, that she was liked as much as she was admired —and that is saying a great deal.

The Creightons put down to the effect of her beauty the fact that they were at this time much more asked out, and asked to better houses than they had ever been before. Several people of social importance took notice of Julian, as they had never noticed her sisters. And a certain Lady Maria Lascelles, whom they had known very slightly, constituted herself a kind of chaperon to the girl, and took her out with her to great houses where Mrs. Creighton never received an invitation for herself. If that good lady had not been altogether delighted and flattered at her daughter's distinction, she would have been angry to feel herself left out; but the maternal instinct was gratified, and, although Julian had once been the best-snubbed girl of the family, she was now the privileged favourite, and might do and say almost what she liked—so long as it had no reference to her experiences at Quest.

"Please do not talk to me of that dreadful place," her mother said to her. "It was by the merest chance that you did not see the murder committed, and I should like to know who would have invited you out after an appearance of that kind in the witness-box?"

"I think it would have been to my advantage rather than otherwise," said Julian. "People like sensations, and I should have been a heroine. But, by-the-by, mamma, it wasn't a murder, you know."

"If it were not a murder—manslaughter is only a pretty name for it—I should like to know what Francis Moor is in prison for?" said her mother, frigidly.

"Alys had to give evidence," Julian was beginning, rather unadvisedly; but her mother at once cut her short.

"I would rather not hear anything about Miss Lorimer. I never liked her, and now she is quite out of our set."

"But isn't Edmund engaged to her," said Julian, calmly.

"Certainly not. At least, if he is, it is against your father's wishes and mine."

"His house is very pretty," said Julian. This was a thrust in return for her mother's attack on Alys, which Julian resented; for Mrs. Creighton had never yet been asked to inspect the house which Edmund was furnishing for his bride. But she showed no sign of discomfiture.

"I have never found time to go over it," she said. "Some day, when we are not busy, we might drive round that way."

Julian smiled. She knew very well that her mother dared not enter the house without an invitation from her son. Edmund was the one person of whom his mother was slightly afraid.

"What are you looking at, Julian?" Mrs. Creighton asked, a moment later.

"The Academy catalogue, mamma."

"At the index, apparently. Interesting reading!"

"I was trying," said Julian, with a little flush on her cheek, "to find the name of an artist in whom I am interested."

"And who is that?"

"A Mr. John l'Estrange—here he is. Two pictures—ah!"

"What is the matter?" said her mother, struck by the tone of the ejaculation.

"Nothing." Julian blushed, and looked confused.

"Nonsense—nothing! You said 'Ah,' as if you were surprised at something. Nothing is more ill-bred than unmeaning exclamations of that kind."

"I was only surprised at the subject of the pictures," said Julian, making a little effort over herself. "They are landscapes: one is called 'Crosthwaite,' and the other 'Below the Tarn.' I think they must be taken from places near Quest," she concluded, demurely.

Mrs. Creighton gave herself an impatient shake. Then she asked a question in her driest tone—

"Does this artist live at Quest?"

"Oh, no, mamma. He was staying in the neighbourhood. Edmund knows him."

"Edmund may know a good many people whom it is not fitting for you to know," said Mrs. Creighton, with decision. "Have you seen this man in London?"

"No, mamma."

"That is a good thing. Remember, Julian, if you do meet him, that I desire you not to renew the acquaintance. No doubt you met all sorts of queer people at that place in Cumberland, but there is no reason why you should continue to know them for ever afterwards. *Any* sort of connection with Crosthwaite is objectionable to me, after the late painful and disreputable occurrences near Quest."

"But Mr. l'Estrange had nothing to do with Quest, mamma."

"If by any chance you met him and spoke to him, do you suppose he would not mention Quest? Of course he would; and it might be very awkward. I do not wish any one to know that you ever stayed there, or have any acquaintance with Crosthwaite."

She spoke majestically, as one who is justified in laying

down the law; but on receiving no answer she glanced up and read rebellion in Julian's face. The girl was standing by a table, on which the Academy catalogue had been laid; she was looking at the open page, and there was a red flush on her face, a mutinous expression on her open brow. Presently she looked up, pushed the book away, and faced her mother with her hands behind her, quite in the old school-girlish way.

"Mother," she said—and Julian said "mother" only when she wanted to speak seriously—"I must tell you one thing. I do not think I can promise to obey you. Mr. l'Estrange was very kind to me: he is a great friend of mine; and if I see him I shall most certainly speak to him."

"Julian!"

"I am sorry, mamma, but I can't help it. He was kind and good to me; indeed, I think he is one of the best men I ever met; and I cannot be ungrateful. But I will promise you this—that I will not talk of Quest or Crosthwaite so that any one shall overhear me. I will be very careful, but I will not promise not to speak to Mr. l'Estrange."

"You were always a wilful, undutiful girl, Julian. Well, I shall speak to your father about it, and perhaps you will do what he tells you."

"I am wilful, I know, but I don't think I am undutiful," said Julian, who was always capable of forming an independent judgment. "And I warn you, mamma, that what papa says won't make a bit of difference."

"You are an impertinent girl," said Mrs. Creighton, with dignity, but she said no more; and Julian did not believe that she would speak to her father at all.

Mrs. Creighton punished her rebellious daughter, however, in a rather ingenious manner—by delaying her visit to the Royal Academy as long as possible. Of course, it could not be put off altogether: it was one of the things that had got to be done, but it was put off long enough to make Julian exceedingly impatient. At last it took place; and as soon as she could the girl found the pictures painted by her friend, and sent (she believed) to the exhibition in

deference to her own wishes. She felt a glow of pride in thinking that she could influence the actions of a man of genius like Mr. l'Estrange.

She was quite sure he was a man of genius. He had impressed her with something that she called genius, but which was possibly only a kind of greatness of nature, such as some few men are born with, and which cannot be acquired. She was not experienced enough to know this: she was only certain of the fact that she admired him, and could account for her admiration in no other way than concluding him to be a man of uncommon talent. But she was a little disappointed by the pictures when at last she stood before them. They were pleasant, they were even charming; but they did not strike the eye, and no crowd had collected to admire them. Mrs. Creighton, who noticed, of course, the name of the artist, put up her long-handled eyeglass critically.

"Well, Julian, I don't see that your friend's pictures are so especially remarkable. You girls think all your geese are swans." She was quite restored to good humour by feeling herself able to make this remark, and she gloried in Julian's crestfallen air.

"Why do I care?" the girl said to herself, as she followed her mother through the crowded rooms. "What does it matter whether his pictures are less remarkable than I thought they were? It was the *man* I liked better than his work. I suppose one wonders a little whether in one's inexperience one appraised the man also more highly than was necessary. I was such a child!"

It was not ten months ago; but a subtle change had passed over her since then. She was no longer a child, she was a woman, greatly admired, and conscious of her power, although unaffected by the knowledge of it. As yet it did not seem to her possible that she should take any pleasure in knowing that men sighed for a smile from her.

Indeed, it was all the other way with Julian. There was a young man sighing for her at that moment, and she did not like it at all. That is, she did not like *him*. And yet he was a most unexceptionable suitor: a young baronet with

ten thousand a year and a delightful country house: a man who had been "a little wild," but who would (she was told) make a perfect husband. Mrs. Creighton was always throwing her into Sir Harry Glossop's way; and Mr. Creighton asked him genially to dinner. Even Edmund had a good word to say for him; yet, to Julian's mind, he was woefully stupid, ignorant, foolish, and deficient in all the arts that lend grace and dignity to life. Five minutes talk with Sir Harry made her yawn in his face, for she had no interest in the things which interested him, such as racing, shooting, hunting, fishing, and the like; and then her mother scolded her for being rude, and made her ashamed of herself. And although Sir Harry had not yet "spoken," his manner was so attentive, his visits were so frequent, and his self-complacency so remarkable, that Julian felt sure that he would speak some day.

"You are going to the Kerouels' to-night, are you not?" Mrs. Creighton asked of her daughter, as they left the Academy. Her eyes were roving in every direction over the crowd, as though she sought something—or somebody.

"Of course I am, mamma. You know that," said Julian, a little crossly.

"Did Lady Maria say that she was going to take a party?—shall you go alone with her?"

"She said something about one or two guests," Julian answered, with reluctance.

"Did she mention their names, dear?" said Mrs. Creighton, blandly, but wishing that her daughter would be a little more communicative.

"She said that Sir Harry Glossop would be there. I don't know of any one else." And Julian pouted.

"Don't put on such an ill-tempered air," said her mother, reprovingly. "You will enjoy it very much. And if Sir Harry goes with you to the ball, you will be sure of one partner, at any rate."

"I am always sure of a partner," said Julian, rather provokingly.

"Ah, you are a conceited child," said Mrs. Creighton,

with great satisfaction; and the drive ended with mother and daughter on terms of perfect amity.

Julian was to dine at Lady Maria's house, and go with her to a great ball afterwards. She pretended not to care very much for the prospect, but in reality she was a little excited by it. She had never been to quite so great and distinguished a party in her life before, and she had an extremely becoming new dress for the occasion. She could not help feeling pleased with her own appearance as she stood before her looking-glass that night, while her maid clasped the shining pearls round her pretty white neck, and Mrs. Creighton stood by with a bouquet of white exotics in her hand.

"I never saw you look better, Julian," said the mother.

Privately, Julian agreed with her. The dress suited her admirably. It was of some filmy white substance, draped over white silk, and caught here and there by little trails of small-leaved ivy, the dark green hue of which was peculiarly becoming to her complexion. She had chosen the ivy leaves very much against her mother's wish, but the effect was extremely good; and the dressmaker had brightened it by introducing crystal drops here and there, as if to represent the dews of heaven. Nobody knew that Julian had chosen the ivy in subtle remembrance of those far-off days when she sat beside the tarn, upon a mossy bank, with an ivy-grown ridge of broken earth behind her. She looked like a nymph of the woodlands, with the long, graceful trails of greenery upon her shining dress.

"This bouquet has just come," said Mrs. Creighton.

"It is very pretty, but not one bit suitable. This dress wants a simple posy, not a stiff bouquet of hothouse flowers," said Julian, scarcely glancing at the exotics.

"You must take these: I am afraid it will give such offence if you do not," said Mrs. Creighton in a low tone.

"Why? who sent them?"

"Sir Harry, of course."

"Oh, Sir Harry! Well, it doesn't much matter whether he is offended or not, does it?" said Julian, recklessly. "I

am not going to spoil the effect of my dress for the sake of his feelings, mamma. I have my own flowers here."

She produced a much less elaborate nosegay, a bunch of daffodils and ivy, tied with long white ribbons, the ends of which were spangled like the ivy in her dress. "There! that is much more appropriate. I wanted to look like Spring!"

"It is not a fancy ball," grumbled Mrs. Creighton. "You will be called eccentric, Julian, if you overdo your simplicity."

But Lady Maria did not agree with Mrs. Creighton. She was an old lady, and never concealed her opinion of anybody's appearance.

"Charming, my dear, positively charming," she said. "You make me think of the country and of all sorts of happy things. Was the ivy your own idea? Then I say that you have a perfect genius for dress. Let us hope that your future station in life"—significantly—"will enable you to gratify it."

"I am sure I hope it will," said Julian, innocently. "But you know, Lady Maria, white silk is all very well; but what I really look *nice* in is a linen frock and a straw hat and hobnailed boots: you should see me in that costume if you really want to admire me."

She was laughed at and called a saucy child; but Lady Maria regarded her with approbation, as a young woman who had something to say for herself. Her little grey eyes twinkled as she perceived Sir Harry's open-mouthed admiration, but she shook her head a little when he began to make compliments.

"That won't do," she said to herself. "The girl will never marry a fool."

And she exerted herself a little to keep Julian beside her, so that she should not fall a victim too easily to the enamoured baronet.

The ball was a brilliant success, and Lady Maria was pleased to find that her young charge was generally regarded as the prettiest girl in the room. She danced every dance,

and behaved beautifully, returning to her chaperon's side much oftener than is usually the custom of modern young ladies. Lady Maria thoroughly approved of her.

"Oh!" said Julian, in one of these brief pauses beside Lady Maria, "there's Mr. l'Estrange!"

"And who is Mr. l'Estrange?"

"An artist—a friend of mine—a tall, nice-looking man, standing beside the lady in pink: don't you see?"

"No, I don't think so. At least, I see nobody but Lord Raynflete in that direction: *he's* not the man you mean?"

"No, I don't know him: it is an artist whom I used to know. I did not expect to see him here."

"Ah, well," said Lady Maria, "there are artists and artists, you see. Bring your friend to me and introduce him if you like."

She turned to speak to a neighbour; and Julian, with glowing cheeks and shiny eyes, stood face to face with her old friend, John l'Estrange.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JULIAN'S FRIEND.

"I AM so glad to see you again," said Julian. She would not deny herself the pleasure of saying so, in spite of her mother's objections to reminiscences of Crosthwaite.

"I am very glad to meet you, if I may say so," said the man. He looked very well, she thought: handsomer than she had expected; well set-up, faultlessly dressed, with an air of ease and enjoyment which took her a little aback. It was her bewilderment, perhaps, that made her say, with a *gaucherie* more approaching the manner of the schoolgirl whom he had known, than the belle of a London ball-room——

"I did not expect to meet you here."

"Did you not?" he said, looking a trifle amused. "But

you are right: I don't often frequent these big assemblies. Are you engaged for this dance?"

"I *was*," said Julian laughing, "but my partner has forgotten me, or made a mistake: I see he is dancing with some one else, and casting agonised glances at me over his shoulder now and then."

She nodded and smiled to some one in the distance, and Mr. l'Estrange followed her glance with his own.

"Oh, young Glossop: I see. Then you are free? I may lawfully ask you to dance—or to sit out, if you like it better——"

"I am fond of dancing, but I would rather talk than dance just now," said Julian, frankly. "You see it is not often one meets an old friend."

"Then you count me an old friend!"

"Oh, yes, Mr. l'Estrange; you were so kind to me."

The artist's face underwent two or three changes in the course of Julian's speeches. At first he looked grave, even a little stern and anxious—that was when she spoke of him as an old friend, with a pleasant graciousness that her recent experiences of society had taught her: then his face cleared, so that when she uttered his name and mentioned his kindness, a peculiarly bright and gratified expression rested upon it for a time.

"Will you come and look at the orchids in the conservatory?" he said, offering her his arm. "They are very fine."

Julian glanced involuntarily at Lady Maria, but her chaperon only nodded at her over her fan, and turned smiling eyes of recognition on her companion, who bowed in response.

"Oh, Lady Maria knows you? I thought she didn't," Julian blurted out, as she moved away.

"She had perhaps forgotten. But she has known me a good many years; she has been a good friend to me," said Mr. l'Estrange, quietly.

"For a moment I hardly knew you myself," said Julian. "Dress makes a great difference—even in a man."

"Much greater in a woman," said he. "Perhaps you hardly realise how different your own appearance is—from——"

"From when you saw me last. Oh, but I am quite aware of it," said Julian, merrily. "I was in a short cotton frock and a straw hat; and I had no gloves, I remember, and my hair was all down my back. Oh, I am sure I must look very different—I hope improved, Mr. l'Estrange."

But at the same time she bethought herself of what she had said to Lady Maria about her own looks in the cotton frock and straw hat; and she dropped her eyes that he might not read the little insincerity, the craving for a harmless compliment that had suddenly beset her.

"I don't know—I liked the cotton frock," he said, with a smile; and Julian felt oddly satisfied. She looked up, and all her soul was in her eyes.

"I am glad you say that. I am glad you like the cotton frock best," she said.

"Why?" he asked, in a low, moved tone.

They had reached a shady and secluded spot in the conservatory, where a seat for two persons had been arranged behind a screen of tall ferns and blooming plants. The soft glow of rose-shaded electric lights and of the balls of coloured transparency that called themselves Chinese lanterns, filtered through the shade of greenery and fell in charming tracery of light and shade on the girl's warm whiteness and tender bloom, on her pretty curling hair, and the filmy folds of her snowy draperies. Looking at her, Mr. l'Estrange could not feel quite sure that the cotton frock, after all, became her best.

"Why?" she said, bending her head over her feathered fan, and examining its handle attentively, "oh, because it is in the old frock that I feel real. It is myself that you know in the short frock and straw hat—not the dressed-up young lady with jewels and flowers and fan, which always make me feel as if I were masquerading in things that did not belong to me." She raised her eyes suddenly, and although they were full of laughter, there

was a pathos behind the laughter which struck her listener to the heart.

"That is perhaps only because you are not quite used to them yet: you have not been 'out' very long," he said.

"I don't know: I have been out some months now, and I ought to have grown a little used to things, ought I not? But every time I go to a party, I feel as if I were in 'fancy dress,' don't you know? One has to look in a certain way —not as one feels. If I am feeling serious, you know, mamma will say to me, 'Julian, why don't you smile?' or if I try to tell Lady Maria anything that really interests me, she taps my arm with her fan and says, 'Girls don't talk about these things in society, my dear.' So I have to sit still and look pleasant, even if I am sick, sorry, or sad; and life seems less real every day."

"What are the things that really interest you, then?"

"May one talk about them at a dance, in a white silk dress? Oh, Mr. l'Estrange, I'm afraid you are no better than I am. Like me, you have not been what Lady Maria calls 'perfectly drilled.' I am interested in dreadfully unfashionable things. I like to read about strikes—and I generally take the side of the workers, which mamma says is absolutely immoral of me; and I want to know all about women's wages, and why they are ground down. And somebody took me once to see a Crêche and an Orphanage, and let me play with the children; and I wanted to go once or twice every week, but mamma did not think I had time for it, and did not care to hear me talk about it, so it was rather disappointing."

"Why had you not time for it? What do you do all day?"

"I have singing lessons," said Julian, rather dolorously, "and I keep up my German and my drawing. But mamma wants me very often. I have notes to write for her, and needlework to do; and we pay calls, and drive in the Park, and go out a good deal. Oh, I enjoy it very much: it is all very nice; but it makes me feel *not real*—like my dress. It would be *real* to be poor, and work hard, and wear shabby

frocks, like the majority of Englishwomen: it is the majority who are poor, is it not?—but I have no chance of that, and no doubt I should not like it if I had."

"No, you would not like it, unless your lot in life gave you a motive for it. Women who live in that way are generally working and striving for somebody they love."

"I think," said Julian, quickly, "that the reverse is true, too—one generally loves what one works and strives for."

"Child, where did you get these ideas?"

"I don't know. Partly, I think, from some of the things you said to me. Don't you remember? . . . You made me think and try to understand what life ought to be. But I don't understand, and I don't seem to think rightly," said Julian, with a suddenly clouded brow; "for everybody says that I am wrong."

"No; you are on the right road. Love to our fellows—that is one of the keys to the right understanding of life. And the other is—love of God."

Julian gave him a swift, bright look. "That is what I thought; but in my life the thing that troubles me is that the keys don't unlock anything."

"Patience! You will see your way in time. Only don't lose the keys. You know very well that it must be right to keep them in your hands."

"Yes," said Julian; but she sighed, and her face was suddenly overcast. "Sometimes—it seems as if there was a chance of using them—and that one was throwing it away."

He moved a little uneasily. He wanted to hear more, but scarcely knew how to question. At last he spoke, with great deliberation.

"A woman's chances sometimes—perhaps oftenest—come through marriage."

"Yes," said Julian, drearily. He felt the dreariness in her tone.

"But the chance does not come unless she loves the man she marries."

"Oh, if only I could be sure of that!" said the girl, with a tremor in her voice.

"Are you not sure of it?"

She turned away her face, and spoke rapidly and unevenly. "Mamma says that is nonsense. She says I have no business to think whether I care for any one or not, and that every sensible girl leaves things of that sort to be decided by her parents."

"Don't believe it," said Mr. l'Estrange, with sudden warmth. "Decide for yourself, or you will be miserable all your life afterwards."

She made a nervous little movement of inquiry.

"I am sure you would. Women who marry because their parents tell them to do so are happy only if they are dolls. Women with hearts and brains and souls soon find out that they have made a great mistake. Their conscience is outraged, their lives desecrated: they have tied themselves to a log which will drag them down for ever; and the better and loftier their nature the deeper and more lasting will be their sense of shame."

"Oh, that would be terrible!" cried Julian. Then, lowering her voice, she asked—"But should one put one's own benefit before that of another person?"

"You mean that you are told that you might help and save another person by sacrificing yourself?"

"Something like that."

"Who made you responsible for any man's soul?" said Mr. l'Estrange, rather sternly. "You are only responsible for your own."

Julian listened as if fascinated: a tender colour rose in her face, and her eyes had suddenly grown humid.

"Your first duty is to yourself. You do most good in the world by being true, and pure, and generous, and wise: you do no good to any one by refusing to listen to the dictates of your own heart and soul. If you are untrue to yourself, it is useless to think that you can help another."

"I see," said Julian, simply.

He paused for a moment or two, and then went on in a different tone, and with an evident effort.

"I will tell you something—something about a girl I

once knew. It was a good many years ago. She married a rich man whom she did not care for, because she thought that it was right to obey her parents. The world praised her, and she herself believed that she had done her duty. But the man was uncongenial—harsh—jealous—inconceivably stupid; he was angry when he found she did not love him; and he treated her cruelly. For many years nobody found it out. But—only the other day—she died—of a broken heart."

"Are you sure? Did she say so?"

He bowed his head: it seemed to Julian that his face had grown strangely pale. "She sent—for a man whom she had once loved, when she was on her death bed, and told him so. She asked him to forgive her for having, as she said, ruined three lives by her own want of courage and truth."

"And he forgave her?"

"Yes."

"Was she right? had she ruined his life, too?" Julian asked, almost in a whisper. She knew perfectly well that he was speaking of himself.

He raised his head—and she thought what a noble head it was, and how fine were the lines of his features, the expression upon the grave and somewhat careworn face.

"No," he said, with a manful ring in his voice, "she did not ruin it: she only overcast it for a time. And with that confession of hers, the bitterness of the pain was taken away; only—he does not want to see any other bright and beautiful young creature making the same mistake."

He looked at her so kindly that Julian felt at liberty to give him back a serious and wistful smile.

"You are very kind to me, Mr. l'Estrange," she said, gently, "and I am very glad that I have spoken to you about some of my perplexities. I am sure that what you have said will help me."

"I shall be pleased indeed if it does. And if there is any other way in which I can be of service to you, I shall be glad."

"Thank you," said Julian, grateful, but a little dubious. "Are we likely, I wonder, to meet again? I have not seen you in London before."

"For a good reason: I have only just come up to town. Yes, you may see me again: I should think it highly probable. Are you going to Lady Mountsorrel's on Wednesday?"

"Yes," said Julian, opening her eyes; "are *you?*"

It was impossible for her to keep the puzzled surprise out of her tone. Lady Mountsorrel's house was one of the most inaccessible in London.

He smiled as he replied—

"I believe so. I have an invitation."

"I am going with Lady Maria. She is very kind in taking me about," said Julian, casting down her eyes, in order to hide the embarrassed wonder that she was feeling. How was it that this plain, unassuming, almost commonplace artist had the *entrée* to so many fine houses—houses where even her brother Edmund could not gain admittance? There was something uncanny about it: something that Julian did not understand.

Perhaps he read her confusion in her face, for he spoke very seriously and very gently in another moment's time.

"There is something I think I must explain to you, Miss Creighton. I hope you will not be angry with me for a sort of deception which sprang up almost involuntarily, but which——"

"Oh, hullo, here you are! I've been hunting for you everywhere. It's our dance, don't you know! Who ever thought of finding you cooped up here?" And Sir Harry Glossop cast a glance of extreme contempt and indignation at Julian's companion.

Julian turned her shoulder to the new-comer. "Please finish what you were saying," she said, pleadingly.

Mr. l'Estrange shook his head with a smile.

"It would take me such a long time, that I think I must defer it to another occasion," he said. "Only one word, Miss Creighton: don't believe all you hear."

He bowed and retreated, while Sir Harry, offering Julian his arm, broke out into a grumble.

"Who's that old buffer you've been hiding away with? Some great swell, I suppose, that you don't mind throwing me over for."

"Nothing of the kind: a poor artist," said Julian, boldly. And Mr. l'Estrange, who was not very far away, heard the words, and smiled to himself with supreme satisfaction.

"Whew! Not worth spending so much time over. Everybody's been wondering where you were. I thought you were huffed with me—taken the hump, because I danced with the duchess's daughter. Couldn't help it, I assure you. I would sooner have danced with you than any one in the room."

"I was very glad to sit out," said Julian, coldly. "I was tired."

"Were you really? Well, we needn't dance now, if you like. Sit down here, and I'll get you an ice."

He did not give her time to object. He almost thrust her into a chair; then flew for ices, cakes, strawberries—anything that he thought likely to meet her taste. Julian welcomed them as a diversion: anything rather than Sir Harry's conversation.

But she was not to escape the thing she dreaded. The seat in the corridor which he had chosen was out of hearing of any of the guests. Sir Harry felt that the psychological moment had arrived. He plunged rapidly into an exposition of the desire of his heart. Before Julian knew what he was doing, or could arrest the flow of his eloquence, he was in the midst of that proposal of marriage which she had been longing to avert.

The worst was that he would not take no for an answer. He averred that he had Mr. and Mrs. Creighton's consent, that Lady Maria had set her heart upon the match, and that he would never be satisfied until she accepted him. Julian found herself in the awkward position of not being believed even when she expressed herself as clearly as she could, and to the verge of positive rudeness.

He took her back at last, sullenly enough, to Lady Maria. To Julian's surprise she saw that Lady Maria's nearest neighbour was Mr. l'Estrange, and that he was talking to the old lady as if he knew her very well. But when he saw Julian approaching, he moved away with a bow, and let her take her place beside her chaperon. Lady Maria looked at the girl with twinkling, half-malicious eyes.

"My dear," she said, in Julian's ear, "you are a very clever little girl."

And Julian could not imagine what she meant.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN WHICH EDMUND IS DIPLOMATIC.

Mrs. Creighton's cup was full. Never, she pathetically declared, had so many woes been mingled for the drinking of any respectable British matron, whose sole desire it was that her sons and daughters should marry, and should marry well.

She was sitting alone one morning, writing notes at a davenport, when her son Edmund suddenly walked into the room. This was an unusual occurrence, for Edmund was generally busy at that hour. Mrs. Creighton put down her pen.

"Good morning, Edmund. I am glad to see you. I want to consult you about Julian," she began.

Edmund dutifully kissed his mother's cheek, and drew up a chair opposite hers. "Julian?" he said. "Is *she* giving you trouble? I thought she was such a success—Lady Maria's prime favourite, and all that sort of thing."

"So she is, and it is just that which makes her so tiresome."

"Well," said Edmund. "I'm sorry she is giving you any trouble; but unless it is something extremely important, I would sooner hear it at another time, as I have not much

leisure at present, and there is a matter on which I wished to consult you."

"To consult me?" Julian's affairs went out of the mother's head. Edmund was infinitely more important and precious than Julian in her eyes. "Yes, Edmund, what is it?"

Edmund crossed one leg over the other, and affected to smile at her eagerness. But he was a little nervous, in spite of himself, and his mother suspected as much. She listened with anxious eyes and a foreboding heart.

"You know that I have been going on with the furnishing of my house?" he began.

"So Julian has told me."

"I myself have lived in a corner of it, and superintended everything. It is not a bad house—I always liked Campden Hill myself; and there is a little garden where one can pretend that one is in the country. I had the advice of Morris Burne about the furniture and fittings, and I really think they are rather nice."

"You must have spent a good sum of money on it," said Mrs. Creighton, rather grimly.

"Well, I had been economising for the purpose for some time," returned her son, with a smile. "I had a fair amount on hand. I have been tolerably lucky, as times go."

"Yes, so it seems. Your father, at your age, was not able to throw his money about in the way it pleases you to do."

"My father did not go out of the usual jog-trot line of the profession. I have been fortunate in some of my investments," said Edmund. He would not call them *speculations* when speaking to his mother, least she would take alarm. "I have not been at all extravagent in my expenditure. You must come and look at the result, mother; I should like to have your opinion of the drawing-room."

"I shall be pleased to come, Edmund," said Mrs. Creighton, with dignity. "I began to think that you cared very little for my opinion."

"On the contrary," said Edmund, in his most persuasive

manner, "I care very much—too much, mother, for my own peace of mind, because I am afraid of vexing or disappointing you."

He laid his hand on hers for a moment, and then withdrew it quietly, without undue haste. The Creightons were not, as a family, given to demonstrations of affection; and Mrs. Creighton was gratified, but somewhat surprised, by this approach to a caress. She said to herself that she supposed he wanted to get something out of her, and tightened her lips.

"Well, Edmund?" she said, expectantly.

"When a man gets a house, mother, and furnishes it, you can generally guess what it is for."

"You need not beat about the bush so much, Edmund. You want to get married, I suppose. Who is it?"

"It is Alys Lorimer," said her son, feeling that frankness was now his best policy.

"I thought so. You know my opinion of that girl, I think."

"I am not sure that I do. I am not sure that I want to know. She is almost penniless—her paltry sixty or seventy a year does not count for much—but you cannot reasonably make any other objection to her. She is well-born, well-mannered, and very pretty: a girl whom many people would be eager to welcome as a daughter-in-law."

"Pretty! With that limp!"

"It is very slight. It is almost imperceptible at times, and there is every likelihood of its disappearing as she grows stronger. Her face is always beautiful."

"You cannot deny that she is weak and sickly," said Mrs. Creighton, with vicious emphasis.

"She is delicate. I don't mind that. I detest your bouncing, robust women."

"You are quite infatuated, Edmund. But I will say one thing more—and it is the root of all my objections—the girl is not only weak in body, but weak in mind."

"Mother!"

"You need not fly out at me in that way. I know what I

mean, and I mean what I say. I do not insinuate that she is an idiot or an imbecile—far from it; but I do say that she has no will of her own, no resisting power, no force of any kind——"

"You are quite wrong. She has great tenacity of purpose."

"Oh, so has a limpet," said Mrs. Creighton, snappishly. "But if you once deprive it of its hold, what happens? The creature dies. I should prefer something with, at any rate, an individual life of its own. She has none."

"We had better drop metaphor and come to facts," said Edmund, coldly. "Of course it is superfluous for me to say that I do not agree with you. Alys Lorimer is the girl that I have chosen to be my wife, and I wish to know what line you mean to take, and what I have to expect."

"You do not expect me to receive her with open arms, when I hold my present views of her?"

"Possibly not, but I do expect you to be civil."

Mother and son faced each other for a moment in silence. There was anger in Mrs. Creighton's face, while Edmund showed only a cold impassibility, growing stonier and more rigid when she burst forth into two or three sharp sentences of repudiation of his choice. She did not actually rage—she was too astute a woman to lose her self-control, and, besides, she was in heart rather afraid of Edmund, but she concentrated a good deal of bitterness into the few words she used.

"Very well," said the young man, presently. "We have once or twice discussed this subject, but never quite so frankly. We may as well thrash the matter out this time. What do you mean to do? Are you going to treat her civilly or not?"

"I trust," said Mrs. Creighton, stiffly, "that I shall not forget what is due to her as the wife of my son. I have no desire to see any breach between you and your family. Of course, things can never be the same again; but there is no need for the world to know what we feel on the subject. I shall do my duty, Edmund."

"I am glad to hear it," said Edmund, rather satirically; "but how far does your ideal of duty extend, mother? Does it include kindness to my wife or not?"

Mrs. Creighton suddenly started—with rather histrionic effect.

"Your wife! You do not mean that you are married already?"

"No, of course not. But I soon shall be."

"Soon! Oh, Edmund, without consulting us?"

"It is so easy and pleasant to consult you, is it not?" said Edward, somewhat bitterly. "Look here: these are the facts of the case. Alys has been abroad for the last few weeks with her step-sister, Elizabeth Verrall. She is returning next week, and will, of course, pass through London on her way."

"If you want her to stay here——"

"I do *not* want her to stay here. She was not made sufficiently happy during her last visit for me to be able to propose such a thing. She will stay with her sister at a quiet little hotel that I know of. I have been in correspondence with Miss Verrall, and she agrees with me that it would be much the best plan if I could induce Alys to marry me at once, so that she need not return to Quest—a place which will always have unhappy associations for her."

"Ah, that wretched criminal!" sighed Mrs. Creighton.

Edmund winced and frowned, but, after a moment's pause, went on.

"If she finds that all the arrangements are complete, and that nobody will put any obstacles in her way, I think it more than likely that she will consent. And that is why I have come to you. Of course you will not do or say anything to make her uncomfortable."

"I shall not see her most probably."

"Yes," said Edmund, in a cool, inflexible tone. "I should like you to see her. I should be much obliged to you if you would call on her at Linder's Hotel, and show that you did not retain any memory of former unpleasantness."

"Really, Edmund, you ask too much," said Mrs. Creighton, in an amazed tone.

"Not at all too much, my dear mother. It is the only thing you *can* do, if you wish to maintain friendly relations with me and my wife after our marriage. That is why I came to talk it over with you beforehand. I want the matter settled now."

Mrs. Creighton protested, rather angrily, that she could not possibly settle the matter in this way; but she knew—and Edmund also knew—that she would be forced to yield. She capitulated at last, and was allowed to retire with the honours of war. That is to say, her son thanked her, and became once more perfectly amiable and suave in manner, as his mother liked him to be. He even went the length of asking her why she was troubled about Julian.

"Julian is a silly girl," said Mrs. Creighton, impatiently. "Sir Harry Glossop proposed to her last night, and she tells me that she has refused him. Such ridiculous nonsense!"

"Glossop is considered a good match, isn't he?"

"Very good indeed. He has at least ten or twelve thousand a year, and a lovely old country house. They say he has sown a few wild oats—but really, what can one expect? He will not make the worse husband for that," said Mrs. Creighton, who naturally took the worldly view of a man's suitability.

"He is a bit of a fool: that's the worst of him," said Edmund, reflectively, "and Julian is a clever girl."

"I wish she were not quite so clever, then. What does a girl want with cleverness?"

"It's rather the fashion for girls to be clever," said Edmund; but he laughed disparagingly at the same time. He did not greatly admire clever girls: Alys was certainly not clever. It was enough, he thought, if a woman were amiable and intelligent.

"I wish you would speak to her, Edmund. Not that it will be of much good when you are making such a poor match yourself. That is one of the worst parts of it. You will be quoted ever afterwards as an example. '*Edmund*

did not marry for money, *Edmund* married for love. *Edmund* was noble and disinterested, and all the rest of it.' Oh, I know!" And Mrs. Creighton sighed deeply.

"I might see her for all that," said Edmund; and guided by his mother's advice, he penetrated to a little sitting-room where Julian usually spent her leisure time. Here she was generally as busy as a bird; but Edmund found her leaning against the open window, and looking out idly at a charming prospect of chimney-pots, tiled roofs, and sooty sparrows. When she turned to speak to him, he saw by her eyes that she had been crying.

"Well, Julian," he began kindly--for in his way he was fond of his little sister, and rather proud of her,—"what have you been doing now?"

"Has mamma told you?" she asked, with a vivid blush.

"She has indeed. How can you account for your misdemeanours? Seriously, Julian, I think you are acting like a fool. You are throwing away a very good chance of establishing yourself in life."

"I do not want to establish myself in life," said Julian. "Not, at least, in that way."

"What other way is there? A woman's vocation is—marriage."

"Oh, Edmund," said the girl, pleadingly, "if you would only persuade mamma that I am not a person whom marriage would suit! If only she would let me go out into the world and earn my living, I should be much happier than if I married any one I did not love."

"Who has been putting these nonsensical ideas into your head?"

"They are not nonsensical: they are true, and you know it—for you are in love with Alys Lorimer; I know you are!"

Edmund felt a little discomfited, but tried to defend himself against the attack.

"A man can afford to indulge himself, my dear: he has his profession; but a woman's career is spoiled if she marries badly."

"Then it must be spoiled," said Julian, with flashing eyes; "for never, never, *never* will I marry Sir Harry Glossop. I wish I could leave London, and go back to Quest."

"I don't suppose you will be allowed to do that. By the by," said Edmund, suddenly, "you never saw anything again of that man who used to talk to you about your drawings —what was his name?"

"Oh, Mr. l'Estrange! Yes, I saw him last night at the Kerouels'," said Julian unhesitatingly, but with a sudden flush which Edmund could not help noticing.

"You did! And—you spoke to him?"

"Oh, yes! I had a long talk with him. I'm afraid mamma would be angry if she knew."

"Angry? Why? Not she!"

"Oh, but Edmund, she begged me not to speak to him."

Edmund laughed as if he were very much tickled.

"Why do you laugh?" said Julian surveying him with suspicion. "Do you think she would like him if she knew him?"

"I am sure she would."

"Well, he is very nice. And he knows Lady Maria quite well. I saw him talking to her. Lady Maria was rather funny last night, I think."

"Funny—how?"

"She looked at me in such an odd way, and told me that I was a very clever little girl," said Julian reflectively.

"And you don't think you had done anything to render you worthy of such praise?"

"Certainly not. I had done nothing—except talk to Mr. l'Estrange."

Edmund laughed, and Julian felt rather puzzled and irritated, but she could not induce him to explain.

"Look here," he said at last; "let us make a bargain."

"Tell me what it is."

"I hope to be going to marry Alys in about a week's time, Ju."

"Oh, I am so glad! I congratulate you, Edmund, I

always knew you were fond of her. But has that anything to do with the bargain?"

"If you will promise to be kind and sisterly and good to her, I will speak to mother about this man—l'Estrange, and dissipate her objections to him. Then you can talk to him as much as you like."

"But there is no need to make that sort of bargain," said Julian, seriously. "Of course I shall be kind and sisterly to Alys, whatever happen. I always liked her—although——"

"Although what?"

"Perhaps I ought not to say it," remarked the girl, ingenuously. "I was thinking that some people said she did not behave quite well to poor Mr. Moor."

"Please keep that sentiment to yourself," said Edmund, with displeasure. "Would you have had her marry a murderer?"

"I don't think he was a murderer. And I think a woman should be true to the man she loves," said Julian, steadily.

"You talk a little too freely about love," returned Edmund. "Your mind seems to dwell upon it in a way that is not becoming in a girl of your age."

"Dear me!" cried Julian, hastily; "if I may think about marriage, surely I may think about love!"

To this remark Edmund had no reply ready, and he soon took leave of her; not forgetting, however, to speak to his mother for a few minutes on his way out, and leaving her—to Julian's great surprise—in an unusually contented and "uplifted" state of mind.

CHAPTER XXX.

A MARRIAGE DAY.

LINDER'S HOTEL was a very quiet, very respectable place, greatly frequented by sober families and old gentlemen from the country, and quite suitable as a resting-place for Alys and Lisbeth when they arrived in London. Edmund met them at the station, and installed them in their rooms: he had taken a private sitting-room and a couple of bedrooms for them, and had instructed the landlord, with whom he was already acquainted, to treat them with the profoundest respect and politeness. But he had tact enough not to stay more than ten minutes on this first occasion; he left them to refresh themselves, and promised to return in the evening.

His quick eye noted at once that Alys was looking better —fresher and prettier than he had seen her for a long time. She had cast off the mourning garments altogether, and was prettily dressed. From the brightness of her eyes, and the readiness of her laughter, he conjectured that she would not take exception to the plan that he was waiting to propose.

It was Lisbeth who surprised him. He had never greatly admired her, and had even disputed her claim to be called beautiful. But she had blossomed forth into a grave splendour at which he stood amazed. She was statelier than ever, and her face was thinned—he called it refined—by thought and suffering. There was a peculiar distinction about her now which could not fail to strike the observer, and he was not surprised to hear afterwards that she had been much admired, and considered a far handsomer woman than Alys Lorimer. Criticism of that kind never disturbed Edmund in the least. "She may be handsomer," he said to himself, "but she is not my style."

She dressed very plainly—generally in black—but she had grown careful of the make and material of her dresses, and seemed always to have hit upon the very thing that became her best. As Edmund watched her move across the

room, with her long robes trailing behind her (she had developed a new liking for a train, and it certainly added dignity to her demeanour), he said to himself, with satisfaction, that even his mother would not be able to find fault with the manner and appearance of the much-dreaded mistress of Quest.

Lisbeth knew of his design to persuade Alys into marrying him at once, and approved of it. If Alys meant to marry him, she had said it would be much better for her to do it at once, and not to return to Quest at all. At Quest it would be impossible to avoid sad memories. The sisters had been cheerful and friendly while they were abroad; but it was possible that division and discussion might arise if they found themselves together in the old house which had been the scene of so much that was tragic and unexpected. Lisbeth shrank less from the prospect of loneliness than from that of Alys's paling, melancholy face.

So it was with a good heart that she left the girl alone with Edmund that evening; and she hoped, honestly and truly, that Alys would put no obstacles in his way.

As a matter of fact, Alys's objections proved easy to overcome. Her nerves were stronger, and her courage was therefore greater than when Edmund had seen her last; and after the first shock, she did not seem to find the proposal utterly unreasonable. And Edmund knew her weak point: he knew how to urge and to persuade.

"It will save you from going back to that horribly lonely place among the mountains," he said to her, with a pretended shiver.

Alys shivered in reality. "It is like a nightmare to me," she said, in a low tone.

"Yes, my dear child, and I don't wonder. You had better not see the place again."

"But, Lisbeth! won't she be hurt?"

"She is far too sensible, Alys; I wrote to her some little time ago, and told her what I thought. She quite agreed with me. She thinks it would be much better for you to marry me at once than to go north again."

"Oh," says Alys, a little hurt; "does she not want me?"

"She is a very sensible person," said Edmund, gravely, "and sees clearly what would suit you best. She is quite willing to sacrifice herself, and let you go. After all, you know, dear, she is used to Quest, and used to loneliness."

"I suppose she is. But I did think—— And what will your mother say?"

"Oh, she is quite prepared for it. I told her the other day," said Edmund, lightly. "I expect that she will come and call on you to-morrow. You must not mind her cold manner, dearest; she really wishes and intends to be kind."

He felt the girl shrink a little, and hurried on immediately to pleasanter subjects.

"The house is all ready. I have amused myself while you were away by trying to arrange it as you would like."

"Have you really?" she asked, with brightening eyes.

"There is a little boudoir for you, draped in the palest shades of *eau de nil* silk, with cream-white furniture and white rugs on the floor. It will just suit you, I think. I was lucky enough to hit on some charming Rossetti sketches for the walls; and there are all your favourite prints from Watts and Burne-Jones in the library."

"Oh, Edmund, how lovely!"

"The piano is a Bechstein—I think I heard you say you liked his instruments. You must come and try it: if you don't care for the tone it shall be changed."

"I am sure to like it."

"Do you wonder that I want to see you reigning as queen and mistress over the rooms that I have designed for you?"

Alys succumbed. It was impossible to her to resist such appeals to her pleasure-loving and artistic temperament. Edmund understood her far better than Francis Moor had ever done. Warmth and luxury and beauty were more to her than any amount of passionate fervour and poetic fire.

"But, Edmund," she said, at last, "how can it possibly be managed in the time?"

"Won't you leave that to me, my darling?"

"Oh, yes—only I wanted to know. Shall you have to get a special licence?"

"No, I knew that my Alys would be reasonable."

"You knew?"

"Forgive me, darling. I put up the banns three weeks ago. There is nothing to prevent our walking into a church to-morrow and getting married straight away."

She pretended at first to be a little angry at his having taken her consent for granted: but her anger was very short lived. On the whole she was rather glad to find the matter taken so completely out of her hands.

The meeting between herself and Mrs. Creighton, on which Edmund insisted, passed off very well. Mrs. Creighton was rather impressed by Lisbeth, and said that nobody had ever told her what a handsome, well-dressed woman the mistress of Quest had turned out to be. Lisbeth's grave and dignified manner obliged the visitor to behave with extreme civility; for there was a look about Lisbeth as of one who would not suffer any rudeness either to herself or to her friends. And Mrs. Creighton was still more favourably inclined when she heard that Lisbeth had insisted on handing over to Alys her share of the money left by Mr. Lorimer; so that Edmund's wife would have at least a hundred and fifty of her own as pin-money, and need not trouble him about her frocks. Mrs. Creighton was the sort of person who thought it absolutely criminal for a woman to be penniless.

She succeeded in offending Lisbeth completely, in spite of her condescending approval. For she persisted in calling Lisbeth "Miss Lorimer," and no remonstrances from Edmund would induce her to change this mode of address.

"My dear Edmund, she *is* Miss Lorimer. Why should she not use her own name?"

"She has always been known as Verrall."

"Absurd! It sounds as if the marriage had not been all right. No, she *must* be known as Miss Lorimer when she comes up to London: it is not respectable to call her anything else."

And, much to Lisbeth's disgust, Mrs. Creighton would not be persuaded to address her as Miss Verrall.

One good result of Mrs. Creighton's approval of Lisbeth was that Julian was allowed to come and see her as often as she chose.

"Such a sensible, superior person," said Julian's mother "could never do her any harm." But she might have altered her opinion if she could have heard a conversation that took place one afternoon when Alys was out with Edmund, and Julian had found Lisbeth all alone.

The wedding was, of course, the chief topic of conversation. It was to be a very quiet one; but Julian, like every other girl, was interested in the choice of Alys's wedding-gown, and her own attire as bridesmaid. There was to be no other bridesmaid; for Lisbeth had refused the office, saying that she was too old for it, and that it would become her better to fill the place of parent or guardian, and give the bride away.

"I have been bridesmaid once before," said Julian. "This is the second time, 'Three times a bridesmaid, never a bride,' is the old saying."

"Is it true," said Lisbeth, rather abruptly, "that you are already engaged?"

An angry spot showed itself on Julian's cheek. "Certainly not," she said, emphatically. "I suppose mamma told you that?"

"She said something of the kind, I think."

"It is quite untrue. I hate the man. I will never marry him—never."

"Is he not a man you could care for?"

"No; he is odious. You don't think it right to marry a man you don't love, do you?"

"No, indeed. I should think it worse than sacrilege."

Julian meditated for a moment or two. "So that is why you approve of Alys's marriage," she said, shrewdly.

"What do you mean?"

"I hope I am not impertinent. I did not mean to be.

But every one knows that Alys was engaged—or half-engaged—to poor Mr. Frank Moor——"

"She did not love him," Lisbeth broke out, in tremulous tones. "Yes, it is far better for her to marry a man she loves—even at the cost of her own faithfulness—and a man's broken heart——"

She stopped abruptly. She had not meant to say so much.

"I know—I understand," said Julian, turning away so as not to see the tears in Lisbeth's eyes.

"Some women would have loved a man all the more because he was unfortunate," Lisbeth went on, hurriedly. "They would have felt the more bound to him in his disgrace—but Alys did not see things in that light."

"You would have done it?"

"Ah, yes—I——"

And there Lisbeth stopped. There was a little silence, and by some newly-developed womanly instinct Julian knew that Lisbeth had loved and was still faithful to the man whom Alys had deserted in the hour of his need.

She slipped her hand into Lisbeth's, and said nothing for a time. When she spoke she did not dare to make any allusion to Francis Moor, so she pursued the train of her own thoughts.

"It would be the same if a man were poor, I suppose," she said softly. "Poor and—what the world calls—*lower* in position than oneself. If one loved him, that would not matter, would it?"

"Nothing would matter if one really loved," said Lisbeth. "Love is the best and noblest thing in the world. The only blessedness is to love and to be loved."

And so strong was her conviction on this point that she did not reflect that it might be dangerous doctrine for a young lady of nineteen.

Sooth to say, Julian was having a hard time of it. Her mother had espoused Sir Harry Glossop's cause, and encouraged him in every way. He came frequently to the house, and paid assiduous court to Julian, who was not suffered by her parents entirely to reject his attentions. Even her

father, usually very indulgent to her, was displeased by what seemed to him like needless obstinacy; and her mother became daily more cold and severe in her behaviour. Julian shed many a tear in secret, but did not once swerve from her decision. She had made up her mind that she would not marry Sir Harry Glossop; and her mother's coldness, her father's displeasure, her brother's remonstrances, had no more effect upon her than the unwelcome wooing of the suitor himself. The only person who openly sympathised with her was Lady Maria, who, much to Julian's surprise, told her that she was perfectly right, and that she might do much better than become Lady Glossop, a paltry baronet's wife.

"I don't want to do better: I only want to be let alone," said Julian.

"Ah, my dear, that's all very well; but I have great hopes for you," said Lady Maria, nodding her curled and feathered head. "You are a good girl, and if you stand to your colours, it will be all the better for you." And she looked so mysterious that Julian could hardly withhold herself from asking point-blank what she meant.

Meanwhile the wedding-day drew on apace. Edmund looked radiant, and Alys seemed to tread on air. Looking at them both, Lisbeth sometimes drew a long breath of uncomprehending amazement. Her own nature was so true and strong that she could not understand how people managed to forget. Here was Alys, who had given up the man she once professed to love, and who cared not although he was in prison, and under a dark cloud of sorrow and disgrace. She seemed to have forgotten his very existence. How was it possible, thought Lisbeth, that such forgetfulness should be?

She did not know it, but she was not able always to keep the silent reproach out of her grave, dark eyes. Alys felt it in spite of herself. She had not forgotten the past: she only wanted to forget it; and Lisbeth's tender and solemn looks sometimes made her remember more than she cared to do.

"Lisbeth always looks at me as if I were doing wrong when I am enjoying anything," she once said petulantly to Edmund.

"Never mind her, darling: she does not mean it," he answered, caressing her. But in very truth Lisbeth's eyes sometimes made him uncomfortable too.

Notwithstanding their apparent joy and prosperity, there was a touch of bitterness in the heart of bride and bridegroom alike. Edmund knew well, although he would not have confessed it for the world, that he had kept silence when his testimony might have counted in Frank Moor's favour; and Alys was not unaware that her evidence had helped the jury in their decision as to Frank's guilt. She told herself that she had only spoken truth, but she had spoken as an enemy, she knew, not as a friend.

The wedding day was one of brilliant sunshine. Alys looked very lovely in her white silk dress, her lace veil (Lisbeth's gift) and orange blossoms; and Julian made a charming bridesmaid. Lisbeth was gravely magnificent in a brocade which Edmund himself had chosen for her; and although there were no guests, and few congratulations, the ceremony was felt to be very successfully performed. Edmund snatched a few days from his numerous engagements to take his bride to Paris; but it was agreed that the orthodox month should be postponed to August, when he could better spare the time to be away.

Alys did not break down till the very last moment. Then, just when she had donned her travelling-dress, and stood with Lisbeth for one last moment before she left the house, her self-possession failed her. She cast her arms round Lisbeth's neck, and sobbed for a minute or two upon her breast. No one but Lisbeth heard, however, the words she said—

"Forgive me, Lisbeth! And ask Frank to forgive me, too. I *am* sorry—indeed, I am—but I could not love him, and I could never have been his wife."

And in Frank's name Lisbeth kissed her, and forgave.

Next day she went back to Quest, and did not see Alys again until, in the darkest hours of her life, Alys sent word to her to come.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MISSING VOLUME.

THE season was almost over. Sir Harry had not relaxed his pursuit, and Julian's resolve had not given way. She began to wonder, however, whether she should be able to hold out to the end. For her sister's pertinacity worried her, and her parents' displeasure did not tend towards peace and quietude in the home. Mrs. Creighton was beginning to threaten her with positive punishment, in the shape of an enforced sojourn with some uninteresting relatives in the heart of the country during the summer months; but, unfortunately, Julian felt that a visit of this kind would be a delightful reprieve, and was therefore by no means impressed with a suitable horror of it.

Lady Maria was going out of town, and greatly wanted to take Julian with her; but Mrs. Creighton refused to let the girl accept the invitation. "I don't trust that Lady Maria," she said in private to her husband. "I don't believe she wants Julian to make a good marriage. I am quite certain that she is upholding Julian in her obstinacy about Sir Harry."

But she could not refuse an invitation for Julian to dine at Lady Maria's house shortly before the end of July. "It's not a party," the old lady said. "One or two old friends of mine—that is all. But I should like Julian to come."

And Julian went.

As Lady Maria had said, it was no party. There were two old friends of hers at the table, whom Julian had not seen before; a staid old gentleman and his wife, who prosed intolerably. Julian wondered why she had been asked to come. It seemed a little odd that no younger person should

have been invited; and Lady Maria did not talk much to her. After dinner, she was asked to sing, and did her best to keep the three old folks awake; but they all nodded, and the old gentleman positively snored. Even Julian herself felt inclined to yawn.

Suddenly Lady Maria roused herself, and spoke in an exceedingly sprightly voice—

"Julian, my dear child, there is something I want you to do for me. Do go down to the library, and see if you can hunt up the missing volume of Sir Charles Grandison. It's the third volume, and I fancy it must be on one of the lower shelves. You won't mind, will you, my dear?"

"Oh, no, I shall be pleased to look for it," said Julian, with alacrity. Almost anything was better than sitting silently in the dull drawing-room, while the three old people dozed. Julian wondered more than ever why she had been asked to come.

She made her way to the library, where she found a lamp already lighted and began her search for the missing volume. Up and down the shelves she looked, but with no result. And when a tap came to the door, she was so busy that she hardly lifted her head to say "Come in." Probably it was one of the servants, coming to tell her that tea was ready in the drawing-room.

"Good evening, Miss Creighton," said a man's voice—a voice she knew. And looking round with a start, she found that the visitor was none other than her old friend Mr. l'Estrange, whom she had not seen for some little space of time. She came forward and shook hands with him, and explained what she was looking for.

"Yes, so Lady Maria told me. She sent me to help you," said Mr. l'Estrange, in his pleasant, kindly way.

Julian might have thought this strange, if she had not by this time been pretty well accustomed to Lady Maria's slightly eccentric ways.

"I don't believe the book is here," she said. "I have looked very carefully. But perhaps you will be more successful than I."

It did not seem as if he were likely to prove so. The book was nowhere to be seen. And presently the two fell into friendly converse, and the search became a little perfunctory, interrupted by snatches of laughter and talk which each of them found pleasant. Julian forgot that Lady Maria might wonder what she was doing, and probably Mr. l'Estrange did not mind.

"And how are you getting on? I have not seen you for a long time," he said, in a tone of almost paternal interest, which he sometimes adopted towards the girl. "Are things going well with you?"

"Pretty well."

"I suppose it would be rude to say that you do not look as if a London season had altogether agreed with you."

"I should not be surprised if you did. I do not like a London season, if I am to take this as a specimen."

"It has had more disagreeables than pleasures?"

"Decidedly more."

He was silent for a moment or two. Then—"Miss Creighton, may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"You will not be offended?"

"I am sure I shall not."

"Is it true, then, that you are going to marry Sir Harry Glossop?"

"No, indeed it is not."

"I beg your pardon. The rumours reached my ears, and —I was surprised."

"Why were you surprised?" said Julian, bending her head as if to look more attentively at the book-shelves.

"I did not think that Sir Harry was quite the man whom you would like. But perhaps I am impertinent."

"Oh no, no," said Julian with quivering lip. Then, while her eyes filled with irrepressible tears, she added quaintly, "It is just that which makes the disagreeables."

"I thought so. Of course, every one knows that he desires it. He makes no secret of his intentions."

"So I have been told. Yet he knows quite well——"

"Knows that you do not like him?"

"Yes."

"Then why does he persist?"

"My father and mother wish it," said Julian, in a very low voice.

"But surely in these days they do not urge it when you dislike the man."

"They can't force me to accept him, of course. But they try to—persuade me."

"That must be very unpleasant," said Mr. l'Estrange.

"It is horrible," said Julian. And although she turned aside her face, he was sure that she was crying.

"I am afraid," he said after a short pause, in a very gentle voice, "that your life is not—not—so happy as it perhaps might be."

"It is miserable," said Julian passionately. This proffered sympathy unlocked her heart. "My mother cannot see why I should not accept him: she is disappointed and vexed, and she will not let the subject drop. I suppose it is natural from her point of view. But it makes me very unhappy."

"Still, you do not mean to yield?"

"Never."

"I wonder if I could help you," said Mr. l'Estrange.

There was a curious thrill in his voice. For some reason or other, Julian's heart seemed to stop beating when he spoke, then throbbed violently, so that her breath grew short. She remembered, too, all that he had said about his own sad story, and her eyes grew dim with unshed tears again.

"Don't you think it is possible?" he asked, still in that strange low voice which had an odd effect on Julian's nerves. "I am much older than you, but I think I understand you—I believe that I could make you happy. If you would but trust your future in my hands——"

The world went round with Julian. What was he saying? There was a rushing sound in her ears; she gasped actually for breath. As in a dream she heard him ask her to be his wife.

"I would do my utmost to guard you and give you all that you desire," he was saying. "Of course I know the drawbacks, I know my own limitations, I am many years your senior, and perhaps you would never care for an old fellow like me."

Then she found words. "It is not age that matters," she said; "but that you love—you have loved——"

"That love died years ago," he said. "The only love I have now is my love for you, Julian. Do you doubt it? My dear, I have tried in vain to hold it back, feeling that it was absurd for me to hope; but now that I have broken my silence, you must let me tell you that I can honestly say I have never loved before as I love you, Julian, as I shall love you to the last day of my life."

There was a silence. Julian was standing against the bookshelves, with one hand shading her eyes. There was a conflict raging in her soul. She did care for this man, yes, she was sure of that; but she felt convinced that her choice of him would cause a terrible breach between herself and her family. Her mother and father would never consent to her marrying an obscure artist, poor perhaps, and unknown. Could she fight them for his sake?

"Could you care for me, Julian?" his gentle, musical voice was saying. "In spite of all my disadvantages, do you think that you could give me a little love? You don't know how I have longed for it, how starved my heart has been. Nobody shall be loved more than you are loved, dear, if you will be my wife."

The girl took her hand away from her eyes, and looked at him. Then she made a step toward him, and held her hands out; he needed no other answer, no other invitation, in a moment he had taken her in his arms and kissed her on the lips.

"Are you sure?" he said presently, in a wistful tone. "You think you really can like me, Julian?"

"I am quite sure I can."

"I am ever so much older than you. I believe I am turning grey."

"I am sure you are not. And what does it matter if you are?"

"And what will your friends say?"

"I suppose they will be very angry," said Julian; "but I do not see how I can help it."

He laughed a little, and pressed her closer to him with his arm.

"Does your mother know of my existence?"

"Yes," said Julian, blushing. "She told me if I met you I had better not speak to you."

"Why?"

"She thought I had better not continue to know anybody that I had known at Crosthwaite. And—an artist, you see——"

"You don't mind my being poor and unknown, do you, Julian?"

"Not one bit."

"You would never leave me for a richer man?"

"I hate rich men. I always wanted to be poor."

"Even to live—let us say—in a cottage, and make your own frocks? I remember it was your aspiration once upon a time. Do you hold to it still?"

"More than ever."

He laughed delightedly, and kissed her once again. And he was still holding her and gazing into her eyes, when the door was thrown opened, and Lady Maria hobbled into the room. Julian tried to start away; but her lover held her fast, and turned a smile of triumph on his hostess.

"Young people! young people!" said Lady Maria. "What does all this mean, I should like to know?"

"It means that Julian is going to be my wife, Aunt Maria,—that is true, is it not, Julian?"

"Aunt Maria!" Julian whispered, turning very pale. "What did he mean?"

Lady Maria nodded, "That's right," she said. "Come and kiss me, my dear niece! Didn't you know he was my nephew? Ah, I always said that you were a clever little

girl to have taken Raynflete's heart by storm. Plenty of people have tried, I can tell you; but you are the first that had a chance."

"What do you mean? Why do you call him—his name is——"

"His name, my dear," said Lady Maria, chuckling, "is John l'Estrange, Lord Raynflete; and I think even your mother may be content to forego young Glossop, when her daughter has made the match of the season."

"Forgive me, dear," said Raynflete, penitently, as Julian tore herself away, and gazed at him with something like horror in her great eyes. "I never meant to deceive you so long. It began in a mistake and then it drifted on. Even if I am not the poor artist that you thought me, you can love me a little still, can you not?"

"Oh, I did not know, how could you? If I had thought——" and Julian stopped, confounded by this sudden change of fortune.

"It makes no real difference, does it?" he said, looking down into her sweet startled face. "I am the same man, after all."

"But you can't give me a cottage to live in," said Julian, recovering herself a little, and laughing to hide the fact that tears were in her eyes. "And I should dearly like to make my own frocks."

"Come up to the drawing-room and have some tea," said Lady Maria. "Love-making is very thirsty work. Julian, dear, I hope you are obliged to me for sending you down to look for the third volume of Sir Charles Grandison. Curiously enough, I found it in the drawing-room, just after you had gone."

"Then did Lady Maria know all about it?" said Julian, half reproachfully, as she followed her hostess upstairs.

"I took her into my confidence some time ago, dear. You have been followed so closely by Sir Harry, that I thought the season would go by without my being able to speak to you. So, at last, I persuaded her to ask you to dinner to-night."

"It was very wrong and unkind of you," said Julian. "Suppose I had been wicked, and refused you because you were poor."

"I knew you too well to fear, darling. I knew that you would choose love even with poverty, rather than riches and lovelessness. You were too noble, too brave, too strong to choose the lower path."

"You showed me the way," Julian murmured; and she turned upon him a look of love and gratitude, which he could only answer by a kiss.

There were no difficulties in Julian's way. Mrs. Creighton capitulated at once, and threw Sir Harry over with the utmost shamelessness as soon as she learned the name and station of her daughter's new suitor. Edmund had already enlightened her as to his identity; and she had been content that Julian should talk to him; but it did not occur to her that matters had gone so far, or that he was on the point of declaring himself. Henceforth, the course of true love could not have run more smoothly.

Julian was a little displeased at the pleasure displayed by her relations, and the congratulations which she received from all the world.

"I quite regret the poor artist," she said to her lover more than once in a plaintive tone. "He came up to my ideal far more nearly than you can ever do."

Raynflete laughed.

"I am sorry I cannot gratify your love of poverty," he said.

"I will tell you what we will do," said Julian. "We will at any rate get rid of the feeling that we are rich. We can do that if we use all we have as a trust for others rather than for ourselves, can we not?"

"That is the only way in which I could ever excuse myself for being richer than my neighbours," he answered, whimsically. But there was sound and sober earnestness behind his smile, and Julian knew in her heart of hearts that the man whom she had chosen would be her guide and her helper in everything that was high, noble, and of good

report. It was the best possible basis for mutual love; and possibly explained the fact that in after years, the case of Lord and Lady Raynflete was often cited as an instance of perfect happiness in marriage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AFTER TWO YEARS.

Two years may seem a long time to think of beforehand, but it passes very rapidly and counts for little in the retrospect. Two summers, two winters, had passed away since Francis Moor was sentenced to the expiation of a crime, which was a crime surely in the eyes of the law only, and not in the eyes of God; and the day was drawing near when he should be set free to begin his life over again with tarnished reputation and a sullied name. How would he face it? how would he set himself to life and work? with such a terrible weight behind him—a weight of humiliating memories, of an undying grief. Lisbeth used to sit and dream over his future when her day's work was done, but she never came to any satisfactory conclusion about his fate.

She was very much alone at Quest. Even the old aunt had died, and there was no one whom she felt it a duty to tend and love. Her grandparents were gone, Zadock was gone; Alys was married; Frank was in prison, she was utterly alone. She had few friends in the neighbourhood, and she shut herself up at Quest more than ever, now that her friends were dead or gone away. True, her life was a busy one, and she worked hard, and kept others at work on the farm and in the dairy, but why she did this, nobody knew. It was suggested to her once or twice that she had much better give up the farm and live on the money that her grandfather had bequeathed to her in a quiet way; but the suggestion was never made twice by the same person. Lisbeth had a way of looking the speaker down which was apt to

discomfort any but the boldest men. She never answered in words; indeed she had nothing to say. She could not very well explain that she was staying at Quest so that Frank Moor might know where to find her when he came home again.

The only place where she visited was Moor End. To her surprise, perhaps to her pleasure—Lady Adela had sent for her, soon after her return from London, after Alys's marriage. She went at once. Lady Adela welcomed her like an old friend. The mother was very worn, very sad, very much depressed; her eyes had almost failed her from long weeping, and her manner had lost all its stateliness and frigidity. It was Lisbeth now who was the statelier lady of the two.

In the few short letters that she received from Alys, Lisbeth learned that she was well and happy in her new home. Happy in the main, although there was now and then a touch of apparent discontent or mournfulness which Lisbeth could not altogether understand. She put it down to Alys's habit of slight dissatisfaction with her surroundings, and also to a certain delicacy of health now making itself felt. When Alys's child was born, Lisbeth felt sure that she would write more cheerfully; and she wished now and then, with a sort of jealous pain, that Alys would summon her to her side.

But Alys did not seem disposed to do anything of the kind. Her hour came and went; a beautiful little girl was born into the world, and the young mother wrote a rapturous letter in praise of her baby daughter's beauty. Lisbeth rejoiced—yet laid down the letter with the old feeling of bewilderment of misgiving.

"Does she not feel? Does she never remember? Is it true that people may be shallow and fickle and false, and yet enjoy perfect happiness? I could never be happy again if I had gone through Alys's experiences," said Lisbeth, with the sore, sick sensation, of which every earnest nature is at times conscious, when the puzzles of this life baffle it at every turn.

She was more pleased with Julian's letters than with Alys's. Julian wrote to her regularly; for she and her husband had a great respect for the mistress of Quest, and liked to hear from her. It did Lisbeth good to read Julian's letters. They were like herself, frank, free, vivacious, thoroughly sincere and earnest; and they told of what Julian called "real things," work done for a purpose, help given to others, honest endeavour to benefit the world. They came to Lisbeth like a healthy mountain breeze, showing her—if she needed showing—what married life could be.

Now and then Julian gave her a word of news respecting Alys. "I went to see my sister-in-law this morning," she wrote one day. "She looked very pretty, but rather more delicate than I expected. I think she and Edmund go out too much; I hear of nothing but dinners and dances, and evening amusements of all kinds. Perhaps you could give her a word of advice, for I am sure she is over-doing it. The baby is a very pretty child, but Alys has not time to see much of her. There is a beautiful nursery, and a very good nurse in charge; so the poor little mite is by no means neglected, but if I were Alys, I do not think I should like to be out so much."

To Lisbeth's mind this was an ominous letter. Could Alys be turning into a fashionable fine lady, too grand to look after her own little girl? She sat down and wrote a letter of remonstrance, but tore it up. After all, what could she say? She had heard nothing that she could reasonably object to. Alys was fond of going out, and the nurse looked after the baby. There was nothing to be said. Yet all through the spring days after the arrival of that letter, Lisbeth was haunted by a fear. Lady Adela sent for her a day or two later. Lisbeth always went, whenever Frank's mother intimated a desire for her presence. She found Lady Adela sitting with a letter in her hand and a flush on her cheek, which told Lisbeth something important had occurred.

"Come in, Lisbeth. Sit down, my dear. I have a letter here—a letter from my son. There is one from the governor too. He is coming out, Lisbeth; he is coming home."

"I thought it would be about this time," said Lisbeth.

"What am I to do with him, Lisbeth? What am I to say to him? He seems so dejected, so broken-down. He will never care for his life here again, yet what is he to do?"

Lisbeth sat silent; she had no answer ready yet.

"I am sure of one thing," said Lady Adela, with nervous rapidity; "he must be soothed, comforted, made to feel that here at least we think no ill of him. I shall lead him to see that this is his true refuge, his harbour of safety and peace. If I can keep him for a time from all sad associations, from all reminder of the past, he may recover his feeling of hope, his strength for further effort—do you not think so?"

Lisbeth looked at the delicate, anxious face, turned appealingly to hers with eyes that could scarcely see, and answered gently—

"It might be a good thing, if it could be done. But how can he be kept from sad associations?"

"Oh, Lisbeth, dear Lisbeth, there is at least one thing that can be done. Yet how can I say it, when you have always been so good and kind? But the saddest of all associations will cling about Quest—and you."

"You mean," said Lisbeth clearly, but in a very low voice, "that I had better come here no more?"

"Lisbeth, Lisbeth," the mother repeated, as if she did not know what more to say; and then she put her handkerchief to her eyes and burst into tears.

"Don't cry—it is so bad for your eyes," said Lisbeth, quietly. "Indeed, there is nothing to fret about, Lady Adela. I quite understand. I will not come while Mr. Moor is here. If ever he should be away, you will perhaps let me come and see *you*, once in a while."

"It seems so ungrateful. I know you did everything you could for my poor boy; but I am sure he will feel it deeply if he sees you here," said Lady Adela. "You will not mind. You are not offended, Lisbeth?"

"Not in the least. I understand perfectly," said Lisbeth, in her stateliest way. "You must not trouble yourself about it at all, Lady Adela. Do you know that the flowers

in your vases are nearly empty? I am going into the garden to cut some more, and I will make your room look very nice."

She passed into the garden by a side door, with a firm step, and a head held high; but when she was out of sight and out of hearing, her head sank, and the tears came into her eyes. It was a little hard, after all, she knew better than his mother how to deal with Frank. She feared lest he would take her absence as a sign that she had lost her friendliness for him, for he might hear that she had constantly visited his mother while he was away. Besides, had he not promised to come to Quest when he returned? It was a little hard to feel that Lady Adela still looked on her as an interloper and an enemy. Lisbeth had hoped to gain the place at least of a friend.

But she controlled herself after her usual fashion, told herself that she was selfish, and came back to Lady Adela with dry eyes and smiling lips, as well as an armful of flowers. She arranged her treasures of hyacinth and daffodil as well as she was able, read aloud a little while to Lady Adela, and then took her leave, feeling that she was saying goodby to Moor End for ever. She would never go back again—not even if Lady Adela sent for her—she said bitterly to herself.

She walked home rapidly, full of passionately sorrowful and angry thoughts; but all these thoughts were laid to rest when she reached Quest by the intrusion of another element of love and fear.

The telegraph boy had been to Quest. His visits were so rare that Lisbeth tore open the orange-coloured envelope with a strange sensation of dread. And as she let the thin pink paper drop from her hand, she felt as if her worst forebodings had been realised.

"Miss Verrall,
"Quest,
"Crosthwaite.
"Come to Alys at once, if you possibly can.
"Edmund Creighton."

He had not said why. But he would not have telegraphed in that way if there had not been trouble in the house.

Lisbeth looked out the next train in the time-table. There was one at eight o'clock, she would reach London before seven next morning. It was a slow train, but she could not help that; it was the only one there was. She collected a few things together and put them into a bag; she gave orders to her servants, and wrote down some memoranda on paper for their use, then she set off to walk to the station in her vigorous energetic way. One of the servants ran after her with a packet of sandwiches and a flask; in her haste she had forgotten to eat, and would have no chance of a meal again for many hours.

Lisbeth felt that she did not want the food, something seemed to rise within her against it; but she would not disappoint the kindly maid-servant, so she put the parcel and the flask inside her bag. The stable boy wanted to carry it for her, and she let him; she had always had a liking for that boy since the days when he was Zadock's servant and friend.

How terribly long and dreary that journey to London seemed! She could not sleep, and her mind revolved in endless iteration the things that might have occurred. Was Alys ill? Probably; but why had Edmund Creighton not said so? Or perhaps it was the child—but Lisbeth was startled at the thought that in trouble of this kind Alys should turn to her. She had not expected it. Alys had seemed to go a great way off from her as soon as she was married.

The London streets looked dim and ghastly in the early morning light, as Lisbeth drove through them in a cab. It was a bad sign, she thought, that nobody was at the station to meet her. She had telegraphed that she was coming, so that they knew when she would arrive. She made the best of her way to the pretty little house on Campden Hill, which Edmund had had such delight in furnishing for his pretty, delicate bride.

The house had no prettiness apparent now. It was still shuttered and closed; there was a carriage standing at the gate. The doctor's carriage—Lisbeth was sure of that. She went up the path to the front door, and rang as softly as she could. The door was opened almost immediately by a woman, whose eyes were red with crying, and whose dishevelled, capless state proved the disorganisation of the household. Lisbeth could not speak, she looked dumbly at the woman, who answered with a sob—

"She's still living, ma'am, they say; and would you go up at once, or will you have some breakfast?"

"I'll go up at once," Lisbeth managed to say. "She was still living? Who was she? Alys? her little sister whom she had loved?"

The house was very still. Lisbeth was induced to drink a cup of coffee, and she asked no more questions, indeed, she was afraid to ask. The maid evidently took it for granted that she knew, for she proffered no information. And so, at last, Lisbeth was led upstairs.

She was not taken to Alys's bedroom; this was a surprise, and even a relief to her. She was conducted to the nursery, the pretty, bright, light room which she had been shown, with an air of mystery, before the days of Alys's marriage. "A spare room," she had been told; "but if ever we want a nursery, you know——"

The scene came back to her quite vividly as she mounted the stairs; she seemed to see the pretty blush and smile with which Alys had whispered the words so that no one else should hear.

In the nursery, a little group had gathered round a baby's cot. The doctor stood beside it, grave and professional; at his side was Edmund Creighton, very pale, with a look of great oppression upon his brow. A maid was audibly weeping in the background. But Alys, where was Alys? Lisbeth didn't see her at first.

Alys had thrown herself down on her knees beside the little cot. Her hands were clasped before her, her face was white as death itself—white as the little baby face that lay

on the bed before her. But worse to Lisbeth than its whiteness was its terrible rigidity. A horror seemed to have fallen upon it, which had not the look of ordinary grief. There was something more than the agony even of the woman who loses her first-born child. If Alys had looked like this the day before, when the telegram had been despatched, Lisbeth did not wonder that they had sent for her.

Edmund Creighton saw her first. He started slightly, and moved a step from the bedside, as though to make room for her. But she shook her head, and went round to the other side, where Alys knelt. She put her hand on Alys's shoulder, and waited for some response. But Alys made none. With fixed, colourless features, and motionless limbs, she knelt and looked at the face of her child as if she were unconscious of anything beside.

Lisbeth also looked at the child. It was plain that she had been a beautiful child, with her delicate little features, her soft rings of golden hair, the long dark lashes that lay upon the waxen cheek. But, although the limbs were not wasted with long disease, there was a look upon that little face which showed that life was well-nigh gone, if not indeed departed. There were strange violet shadows about the eyes and round the little mouth, the soft little features were pinched and sunken. Lisbeth's experience of the sick told her that hope was already over. She looked at the doctor, and read the same verdict in his face. She looked at the father, and saw that he knew the truth. And then she glanced at Alys, and saw, to her inward anguish, an expression that told of passionate hope still existing beneath the semblance of blank despair.

The doctor bent, raised the little hand, and put it gently down again. Then he glanced at the father. Edmund put his hand over his eyes, and turned away. Even at that hour, Lisbeth was surprised to see him so much moved.

But Alys still knelt on, with her eyes fixed on the child's face. The doctor said a word to Mr. Creighton, but he shook his head, and stood with his back turned to the cot

and to his wife. Then the doctor looked at Lisbeth, as if he read the promise of help in her strong and tender face.

"It is all over," he said in a low tone.

"Alys, my darling, come with me, will you not?" said Lisbeth.

But Alys took no notice.

Lisbeth knelt beside her, and folded the slight form in her arms.

"She is quite well and happy now," she murmured. "You can do nothing for her, dearest; she has gone to her Father in heaven."

Then Alys raised herself and spoke.

"Dead?" she said hoarsely; and Lisbeth did not know that it was the first word she had spoken for four and twenty hours. "Is she dead?"

She read assent in Lisbeth's grieving face.

Then she rose to her feet, and stretched out her hands with a loud and bitter cry. "Oh, my child, my baby—dead! And I have killed her—I—her mother—a murderess!"

Lisbeth caught her as she fell. She was carried senseless to her room, where she lay for hours between life and death.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MRS. CREIGHTON'S SUGGESTIONS.

"But how did it happen?" Lisbeth asked the doctor.

He drew in his lips.

"It is a little difficult to say. There seems to have been a mistake on Mrs. Creighton's part. She came home from a dinner-party, went to the nursery, and thought that she would give the child some medicine that I had ordered. She unfortunately mistook the bottles, and gave a strong opiate which Mr. Creighton had been taking on account of long-continued sleeplessness and neuralgia. The child was

unable to rally—in fact, the dose would have endangered the life of an adult."

"My sister was not to blame," said Lisbeth quickly. She was struck by something that seemed to savour of disapproval in Dr. Parfitt's tone.

"Oh, certainly not; it was a misadventure," he replied with great promptness. "I shall have no hesitation in stating that fact at the inquest."

"There must be an inquest!" said Lisbeth, in dismay.

"Oh, yes, no doubt of that. What else could you expect?"

"My poor Alys! It will be such a trial to her!"

"Mrs. Creighton is your step-sister, I believe, Miss Verrall," said the doctor, cautiously.

"Yes."

"May I speak frankly to you about her?"

"Most certainly."

"It will be a little difficult," said the doctor, who was a kindly man at heart, "to prevent Mrs. Creighton from accusing herself too wildly of culpable carelessness. She is herself inclined to think that she had neglected the child; and it must be our endeavour, Miss Verrall, to prevent her from having an access of hysterical self-reproach, which would be extremely painful to every one concerned."

Lisbeth's face expressed consternation.

"You do not mean that she was neglectful?" she breathed rather than spoke.

"Not at all, not in the least. Only that she thinks so. And of course—well, she knows that she acted against my advice in going out so much: but that was more for her own sake than for the child's," said the doctor, with some reserve.

"I see," said Lisbeth, sadly. She was beginning to understand Alys's extreme prostration of body and mind. At present even she was kept out of the room, only the doctor and nurse were admitted, therefore she had leisure to hear the different versions of the story with which she was met on all sides.

The truth seemed to be that Alys had gone out a great deal in the evenings—more than the doctor had thought advisable—and that the servants had grown careless during the absence of their mistress. The nurse had left the baby in charge of a younger girl, while she herself went out to a party; the maid had fallen asleep, and when Alys came home she was alarmed to find the child crying pitifully, in evident pain, with no experienced person beside it to minister to its wants. In haste and trepidation, she had attempted to give a simple remedy, had mistaken the bottle in a little medicine chest, and had given the wrong dose.

"And what has become of the nurse?" Lisbeth asked.

"Nurse has never come back since the morning after baby was taken ill," said the nursemaid, who had poured some of these details into her ear. "She came home about three o'clock in the morning, thinking she'd slip in without anybody seeing her; and when she found the servant up, and heard from the page-boy what had happened, she just ran upstairs for some of her things and walked straight out of the house, without so much as a by your leave,"—and the girl waxed indignant, as she told the story—"nor waiting to see how it would turn out, nor nothing. Real heartless, I call it."

"I suppose she was afraid," said Lisbeth, more to herself than to the girl; and then she went once more to Alys's room to know if there was any change, and finding none, wandered down to the drawing-room, when, to her momentary surprise, she found Mrs. Creighton, senior, in animated discourse with her son. She bestowed a curt greeting upon Lisbeth, and then returned to what she had been saying, while Edmund courteously offered a chair to his guest.

Lisbeth had time to look at him now. She saw that he had a very harassed expression, but she put that down to the influence of present circumstances. What struck her more than this expression of face was his leanness and the way in which his hair was thinning at the temples. He looked ten years older than when he had married Alys, and the trouble of the last two days did not altogether account

for the change in his appearance. Lisbeth wondered involuntarily whether the marriage had been a happy one.

Meanwhile Mrs. Creighton flowed on in voluble speech.

"I always told you that she was going out a great deal too much. It seems to me, Edmund, that you made a great mistake in allowing it. Alys was always nervous and delicate; she got thoroughly overdone, and this is the result —your poor child is dead under most peculiar circumstances."

"Under such trying and painful circumstances," said Lisbeth, interposing—she scarcely knew why—"that I am sure they had better not be discussed until Alys herself is able to tell us how it all happened."

Mrs. Creighton put up her eye-glass, and surveyed the speaker with a look of insolent amaze. Miss Verrall was all very well in her place; she was good-looking and fairly well off; but, really, was she justified in trying to silence her superiors? All this was expressed by the poise of Mrs. Creighton's eye-glass; which, however, Lisbeth was far too simple to understand.

Edmund turned to her with a sudden look and gesture of relief.

"You are quite right," he said, in a voice that he tried to make natural, but which had a dreary and broken sound, "and I am much obliged to you for the suggestion. Let the matter rest, mother, until Alys is able to speak, I beg of you. I should be glad myself," he added, gloomily, "not to hear another word upon the subject."

He walked straight out of the room as he spoke and shut the door behind him. Mrs. Creighton rose in a white heat of anger and spoke indignantly.

"It is the first time I ever heard of a stranger interfering between mother and son," she said, "and I was not prepared for such treatment in this house. May I ask, Miss Lorimer, why I am not to speak to Edmund concerning the death of my poor neglected grandchild?"

"I did not mean that," said Lisbeth, quietly. "You are, of course, at perfect liberty to speak; but I thought that as Alys

was not here, and as she is the chief person concerned, it might be better to wait until she could speak for herself, before we talked over the state of her health, which seemed to be the matter under discussion when I came in."

"I shall speak to my son in private," said Mrs. Creighton, with her loftiest air. "I see your motive."

"My motive was love to my sister," said Lisbeth.

"A desire to screen her, no doubt."

"*Screen* her? There is nothing to screen. She has been very unfortunate, that is all."

"Oh, of course,—unfortunate. It is unfortunate when a woman is not responsible for her actions; but means have to be taken against a repetition of such occurrences."

Lisbeth rose to her feet. She was in a white heat, too. "May I ask what you mean?" she said.

"My meaning is plain enough," answered Mrs. Creighton, with a jarring laugh. "I don't think there is much doubt about it. I shall speak to Dr. Parfitt myself."

"About Alys? She is under his care already. There is surely no need for you to concern yourself, Mrs. Creighton. She has a husband and a sister to stand by her."

"Even a husband and a sister cannot always avail to keep a madwoman out of a lunatic asylum," said Mrs. Creighton, drawing her skirts round her as if she were afraid of encountering Lisbeth's slightest touch; "and I warn you that you will be incurring a very heavy responsibility if you try to prevent her from being put under proper restraint."

"Alys mad! It is absurd," said Lisbeth, contemptuously. "I should sooner think you mad yourself to suggest such a thing." She was quite too angry to remember the claims of courtesy towards Edmund's mother at that moment. "A mistake of the kind she made could be made by the sanest person in the world."

"I am not going to stand by while she makes it again in a different direction," said Mrs. Creighton, with decision. "Good morning, Miss Lorimer. I am going to find my son and to give him my views. His father, I may say, quite agrees

with me. We shall find some way of calling attention to our opinion."

She swept out of the room, and Lisbeth remained alone, a prey to various and conflicting emotions, of which anger was, perhaps, the chief. To think that Alys—the gentle, fragile-looking Alys—should be exposed to the shafts of malice which this woman was evidently delighted to let fly! To think that she could ever be branded with the name of madwoman! The thought was so ludicrous to Lisbeth's mind, that, even in that sad hour, in that house of mourning, she laughed aloud.

She was left long enough for her anger to die down, and be succeeded by overwhelming anxiety. What was Mrs. Creighton doing now? To whom was she speaking, and whose mind was she poisoning? Lisbeth almost made up her mind to go and seek her out, and try to countervail her evil influence; but she came at last, sadly enough, to the conclusion that she would do more harm than good. Mrs. Creighton's position as Edmund's mother gave her a prestige which Lisbeth could not hope to dispute. She could but wait and see what steps were best and wisest for her to take.

While she was meditating on the subject, the door opened, and Edmund himself came in. His air of lassitude was more marked than ever; and Lisbeth was again struck by the absence of that cool elasticity of manner and bearing which had been his characteristic in the days of old. What was it, she found herself asking mentally, that had changed him so?

He entered silently, took a chair and sat down, leaning his elbow on the table near him, and shading his eyes with his hand.

"I suppose you talked to my mother," he began, with a depressed intonation.

"She talked to me," said Lisbeth.

"Ah! And what do you think?"

"Is it necessary to ask?"

"That is just the point." And Lisbeth saw that the

mother's words were already bearing bitter fruit. "It would be a terrible thing if — if—Alys's brain—were affected."

"I think that the suspicion is a very cruel result of an accident that might happen to any body," said Lisbeth, clearly and decidedly.

"Yes; if that were the only thing," said Edmund, in a dull whisper.

"Why—what else is there?" And for a moment Lisbeth's heart stood still.

Edmund took his hand away from his eyes, and threw himself back in his chair with a groan. "I don't know what it is. Ever since we were married she has changed. She is not like the same woman. Sometimes she has drooped and pined, and almost refused to speak for days together; at others she has been unnaturally gay and lively, feverishly anxious for amusements, and ready to sacrifice every thing for the pleasure of the hour. She was in this latter mood on the evening of the day when the child was taken ill. I wanted her to stay at home, but she refused, although she seemed worn out by fatigue."

"I see no particular sign of brain disease in all that," said Lisbeth.

"Perhaps not. What do you see, then?" he asked quickly. Then as she was silent, he continued almost vehemently, "I have my own theory; let me see whether yours tallies with mine. It is no use beating about the bush or standing on ceremony. For God's sake, speak out."

"I was afraid I might hurt you," said Lisbeth, tenderly; "and I did not want to do that. I will say what I really think; it does not sound to me as if she were a happy woman."

"That is it. That is exactly what I have said to myself. But why should she not be happy?"

"Happiness," said Lisbeth, trying to find refuge from perplexity in an aphorism, "is more a matter of constitution than of circumstances."

"She had everything to make her happy," said Edmund,

shaken completely—as Lisbeth noticed—out of his complacent belief in himself and his powers; "everything she wanted in the house, in dress, in jewels, in all that is supposed to content women. I love her—I do everything I can think of to make her happy. She has nothing to complain of from me. Then there was the child—the prettiest little creature in the world. I cannot understand it," he said, getting up and beginning to pace the room with knitted brows and eyes fixed upon the ground. "I cannot understand it—though, perhaps, one should never hope to understand a woman."

"Alys was not always very easy to understand," said Lisbeth, slowly.

"No; that was partly what attracted me to her," he said, turning to her eagerly. "In spite of her apparent gentleness and simplicity, there was something complex, something fine and subtle in her nature, which I used to feel I could not grasp. When I married I thought I should get hold of this strange elusive quality, but it always escapes me. She 'lies in my hand as tame as a peach late basking over a wall,' to use a well-worn quotation, but she has not given me herself."

"Then she could not be happy. A woman always longs to give *herself*." Edmund looked at her. There was something in his face which he did not like to put into words.

"Do you think," he said at last, so slowly and reluctantly that it seemed as if the words were being forced from him against his will, "do you think, that she cared more, cared really—for that other man?"

Lisbeth uttered a low cry of pain and horror.

"What! Care for him—and marry you?" she said, with an intensity of feeling which he had never thought of producing by his question. "What do you take her for? She is your wife. How can you ask me? She is not a wicked woman."

"I beg your pardon," he said instinctively; and then he turned away, and leaned against the mantelpiece, with his back to her, and both his hands over his eyes. Lisbeth's

heart smote her; the man was really in trouble, and she had thrown back his question in his teeth as if it had been intended as an insult.

"I did not mean to speak harshly," she said in a softer tone; "but I cannot believe that Alys could do anything so heartless, and so base, as to abandon the man she loved for the sake of the man whom she did not love."

"Women do it every day," said he gloomily. "Alys was brought up in our world. She is not a country girl, unsophisticated, ignorant of life. She belongs to the set she moves in, and I do not know why she should not be happy."

"Perhaps you have vexed her—disappointed her—alienated her in some way?" said Lisbeth, gravely.

"Then—upon my soul, I do not know how," he answered, with some heat.

"I told you—she had had no cause to complain. But her change towards me has been inexplicable, and I can only account for it——"

"By charging her with madness? That seems like an excess of self-esteem, does it not?"

He faced her sharply. "It is not so—not in the least. It is not because she is cold to me that I fear for her mind—that would be ridiculous indeed—but because of a general change in her; because of these alternate fits of excitement and apathy, and because of an occasional confusion of thought which I have remarked in her."

"Thinking this—knowing this—why did you let her give medicine to your child? It seems to me that you are as much to blame as she."

"Perhaps I am," he answered with unaccustomed meekness, "perhaps I am; I do not know. But it was an accident; neither of us can be blamed."

"No, I suppose not," said Lisbeth, with gathering coldness. "But—it is not so very long ago since you persuaded her that an accident was an unpardonable offence."

"Do you think I need reminding of that?" he asked, with greater bitterness than she had expected to hear. "All

that one can say is that, in that case the law was on our side. But I do not wonder at your making the gibe."

"Oh, it was not a gibe," she answered him earnestly. "I'm too sorry for you both to say an unkind word. Only do—do not—be so ready to think that my poor Alys is out of her mind. I cannot believe that."

"You would be more ready to believe that she was miserable, because she did not love me," he asked with a smile, which seemed to her a very mournful one.

"Yes," she answered boldly; "for she might learn to love you in course of time, whereas madness would make her incapable of learning."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RETRIBUTION.

THE relation of Edmund's troubles added to Lisbeth's perplexities. She did not quite see her way out of the difficulties of the situation. On the one hand, Mrs. Creighton suggested that Alys was going mad; on the other, Edmund seemed to think that she was sane enough, but intensely miserable. And how was Lisbeth to judge of the truth?

After the first few terrible hours, when Alys's life and reason seemed to hang in the balance, Lisbeth was admitted to her room, and sat silently beside her, holding the tiny white hand in her own, and earnestly wishing that she could soothe that troubled heart. But at present there was nothing to be done. Alys was not allowed to talk, and did not seem to wish to do so. She lay perfectly still, and would only with great difficulty be induced to swallow medicine or food. Once or twice she pushed it away, and broke out into a pitiful wail.

"Oh, let me die—let me die! I would sooner die with my baby. Let me die."

But she was too weak to resist when her nurses continued

to press restoratives upon her. So the first and the second day passed; and on the second day the inquest upon the little child's body had to take place.

Alys could not of course attend it: but the doctor allowed her to make a short statement or deposition which was read to the jurymen, who at once passed a resolution expressing their sympathy for the unhappy mother, and giving the expected verdict of "Death by misadventure." The whole thing was conducted very quietly, with as little pain as possible to the family; not a word was uttered on the subject of Alys's rumoured failure of mind, and the only expression of censure was one passed upon the missing nurse, who had never reappeared. Lisbeth felt, in a vague way, as if a danger had been averted; the thing that now chiefly troubled her was Alys's extraordinary apathy, for she lay as if unconscious of what was happening around her, and had only been aroused to gasp out the few words descriptive of her fatal mistake in the manner of one whose faculties were sleeping or benumbed.

But the inquest was over, and Lisbeth was still watching at Alys's bedside when a step came to the door, and halted —as if not knowing whether to proceed or not. Lisbeth hardly noticed it, but she suddenly became aware that Alys's eyes were fixed upon her, and dilated with an expression of mingled horror and fear.

"What is it, my darling?" said Lisbeth, leaning forward and speaking low.

"Edmund—it is Edmund—at the door," said Alys, almost inaudibly.

"Yes, dear; shall I let him in?"

"No; keep him away."

"Don't you want to see him, dear? He is so lonely and sad."

"No; keep him away." Then, with an effort,—"He will never forgive me for killing baby."

"Darling!"

"Keep him away," said the young wife, lifting her head for a moment from the pillow, and showing a hectic spot of

colour on each thin cheek. "I can't see him—I can't—I am afraid."

Lisbeth went reluctantly to the door, almost believing that Alys's ear had been mistaken; but on going out into the dimly-lighted passage, she saw that Edmund, pale as a ghost, was indeed standing outside with a letter in his hand.

"Did you want me?" she said, instinctively, although he had not knocked.

"I wanted to give you this," he answered, holding out the letter. "How did you know I was here?"

"She heard you."

"She is sensible then? I may go in."

"I think you had, perhaps, better not. She does not want —visitors," said Lisbeth, searching about for words which would not wound him over much.

"You mean she does not want me?"

"She is afraid, poor child. She thinks you will reproach her."

"Let me go in, just to tell her that nothing in the world would affect my love for her."

Was it Edmund who was speaking? The roughened utterance, the agitated manner, were not those of the polished, agreeable man of the world whom Lisbeth had known hitherto. Was the man's real nature, or whatever was truest and best in it, breaking through the artificial surface of veneer?

"I do not think you had better," said she, much perplexed. "She is in a very weak state, and any excitement would make her feverish. I will tell her, if you like, what you say."

"Yes, tell her," said Edmund, turning away; "but I suppose it is of no use. If she had ever cared for me, things would have been different now."

And Lisbeth could not deny the truth of his remarks.

The nurse was with Alys, so she thought it better to open her letter by the light of the gas lamp in the passage than to read it in the sick room. As she looked at the envelope,

a thrill, a shot of mingled pleasure and pain, seemed to pass through all her veins. Whose writing was on the envelope? Was it not that of Francis Moor? And was not Francis Moor by this time a free man?

She opened and read.

"Lisbeth," the letter ran, "I have kept my promise. I have been to Quest. I said I would not go away. I would not sever myself from every bond in life without going to Quest again. I wish you had been there. But I have kept my word.

"I spoke to one of the labourers—a new man, I think, who did not know me, and he told me that you had gone to your sister's in London. I did not know her address, and I would not ask for it—very likely he could not have told me if I had asked. I had already written to my mother, telling her not to expect me at Moor End. If she cared to meet me in Liverpool to say good-bye to me before I sailed for America, I should be glad. I fixed a date, a place, a time, for that meeting—it is still a week hence. I have kept my word to you, and gone back once more to Quest; but you were not there, and I will never again go home.

"I meant, on leaving Quest, to go at once to Liverpool, and wait there for my boat. But—I don't know why—something drew me to London—to you—to *her*. I came yesterday, and took a quiet lodging in Bloomsbury. The first newspaper I took up this morning gave me her address, and told me why you had gone to London just when I was coming back to Quest. I see now why I came; it was that I might be near you in this trouble, and might even learn from you how she—who could not endure that the man she loved should have the stain of blood upon his hand—how she bears the knowledge that she has killed her own child. Possibly she does not care.

"But I must know. I shall not leave London until I know. If you can see me, send a line to the address which I give below, and meet me somewhere—wherever you think best—at any hour to-morrow. After dusk if you do not

mind. I hate to show myself in daylight in the open streets. There is a big church not far from you; we might meet at the gate. If you do not answer, if you do not meet me, I shall know that you too have given me up.

"F. M."

Lisbeth's eyes swam in tears. How weary, how bitter, how despairing were the words which he had written! The iron had entered into his very soul. But he had not forgotten his promise to her, and he had wanted to see her—that was something. She thought with pity of the poor mother, whose hopes must already have suffered such a downfall. Could she, Lisbeth, do nothing to avert the crushing blow that was descending on Lady Adela's head? Could she in no way help and comfort the man who had suffered so cruelly, and, as Lisbeth believed, so undeservedly?

She went to her own room, and hurriedly wrote a note to the address given in the letter.

"Dear Frank," she wrote, "I want very much indeed to see you. I will be at the gate of the church you speak of at five to-morrow afternoon. You will be sure to be there. It was my great sorrow when I left Quest to think that you might come when I was away; but they sent for me. Alys is very ill, and feels the poor baby's death terribly. You could not help being sorry for her, if you saw her now.

"Your sincere friend,

"Lisbeth."

She took the letter with her own hands to the nearest pillar-box, and then came back to Alys's room, and took her old place beside the bed.

Lisbeth was to sit up that night. For some time Alys lay in the passive quiescent state which came of her great weakness; but towards midnight, she began to grow restless, and to utter short broken moans and words which brought her sister at once to her side.

"I am here, darling; can I do anything for you?"

"It is you, Lisbeth. Oh, I am glad."

Lisbeth's heart leaped up, it was the first time that Alys had expressed any pleasure in her presence. Indeed, she had seemed to have only an occasional consciousness of it before.

"The nurse would not let me speak last night; I wanted you then, but she would not send for you. Now—I must say something."

Lisbeth did not oppose her. She was of opinion that it would do Alys less harm to talk than to remain silent. It was that strange, dreary, apathetic silence that she dreaded —not the excitement of speech, which might be remedial.

"Drink this, dear; then you can talk a little if you feel inclined," said Lisbeth, soothingly. And then she sat down and laid her cool firm hand on Alys's hot nervous fingers.

"Is—is it all over?" was the first shrinking question.

"All over, dear."

"The inquest—those dreadful men who came to see my poor baby, and hear what I—I had to say?"

"It is all over, darling."

"And now what did they say? Why has nobody been to tell me? Did they say I was a murderess?"

"They were not so unjust, Alys dear. They said how sorry they were—how they sympathised with you and Edmund in your trouble, and how terrible it was for you. That was all."

Alys lay still, with her great blue eyes fixed on Lisbeth's face.

"But—did they not say I must go to prison—like—like——"

She could not complete the sentence, but Lisbeth knew that she was thinking of Francis Moor.

"No, dear; there was no thought of such a thing."

To Lisbeth's surprise, Alys covered her face with her hands, and the tears trickled down between her thin fingers.

"Then it is very unfair," she said. "Oh, I ought to go to prison too. I am just as much to blame as Frank was—poor Frank—when he struggled with Zadock for my sake and threw him down."

"For your sake!" said Lisbeth faintly. She had never heard Alys use this expression before.

"Yes, for my sake—to save me. Zadock had attacked me first."

"But, Alys, you did not exactly say so at the time."

"I know I did not. I was frightened; I don't think I quite knew what I said. I did not think it made much difference."

"It would have made a good deal of difference, I think," said Lisbeth, with a tremor in her voice. "If Frank had been known to be defending you, there would have been a motive for the struggle. But you let it be thought simply that you witnessed it from some little distance—not that you had in any way been connected with it."

"Zadock hated me, you know," said Alys, speaking more connectedly, "and I think he was very angry because Frank had just—kissed me. It was that that made me so afraid to speak out. I did not want every one to know. . . . And it did not occur to me at the time that it would make much difference. But I told it once to Edmund, and he laughed, and said——"

"Yes, dear—said what?" asked Lisbeth eagerly, as Alys paused.

"He said it was a good thing it had not been a hanging matter; for that little incident would have probably decided the verdict, and that Frank would have got off scot-free if I had spoken out in time. Oh, Lisbeth, I have never been happy since."

Lisbeth drew a long breath. Now she understood. There was no need for her to seek other reasons for Alys's unhappiness.

"Since I have been lying here," said Alys, "I seem to see it all quite plainly. I must have been mad or blind, Lisbeth, at the time. Why was it? I was sickened by the sight of that terrible struggle, and it seemed to me as if Frank had been too violent. But last night—in the very middle of the night—I saw it all over again; just as it happened—and yet I saw it differently. Frank was only de-

fending himself; he was not savage or cruel, as I thought. Why didn't I see it then? Why couldn't I say so at the time? I see now that it was my fault—even Edmund made me see that it was my fault—that Frank was sent to prison. I might have spoken for him, and I was afraid."

"What were you afraid of?" said Lisbeth, in a low tone.

"I was afraid of him. I thought of him always as a man with blood upon his hands. Zadock's blood. I could not help it—but I was afraid."

"It was more your misfortune than your fault," said Lisbeth heavily. "We cannot all be brave."

"But I am punished for my cowardice," said Alys, lifting up her weak hands. "I said I could not love a man who was a murderer—although I might have known that Zadock's death was accident, not murder; and here am I now with my own child's death upon my head—a murderess, certainly, if Frank were a murderer. Oh, God has sent a punishment upon me that I do not know how to bear."

She moved her head restlessly from side to side upon her pillow. Her face was very white, but her eyes were burning brightly. Lisbeth caressed her gently, but did not speak. There was something in her throat which made speech difficult.

"If they had sent me to prison, I could have borne it better," Alys cried out wildly. "I had been waiting for that—waiting for the time when I could rise up and say, 'Yes, I am glad. I will expiate my wrong-doing, as he has done.'"

"There was no wrong-doing, Alys. You made a mistake, as others have done before. It was very sad, but it was not a crime."

"And Zadock's death was not a crime," said Alys, "although I said it was. I married Edmund because I felt that awful horror of Frank, as of a man who had killed another man. And now—now—people will have that same horror of me—I know how it feels—that horror of the woman who has killed her child; and I shall be branded as Frank is branded—with an eternal disgrace."

"No," said Lisbeth gravely, "that is not true. You are not disgraced; and neither in the eyes of those who love him is Frank disgraced. You injured him most when you gave up your love for him,—not when you kept a cowardly silence, or spoke against him at the trial."

"Ah, that is the worst of it all. I did not know what I was doing when I said I gave up my love for him."

"You had better not say any more, Alys."

"I am not going to say anything wrong. I don't think I have any love for any one left in me. Not even for Frank, not much even for you, Lisbeth, though I love you best of all. Baby has taken away with her my power of loving—and I think I must have lost the right to love when I gave up Frank."

"Here is Edmund."

"Ah, Edmund!" A tone of sharp terror crept into Alys's voice. "Will he ever look at me without thinking that after all I had better have married the man with blood upon his hands?"

"Alys, child, you are mistaken in him. He told me to say to you that nothing you could do would ever destroy his love. He wanted to come in to comfort you. In his love lies the hope of all your future life."

But Alys could say no more. She broke into tears, and clung to Lisbeth sobbing.

"There is no hope," said she. "I am not fit to live. I have spoilt two men's lives for them, and I have killed my child. I think that in God's sight I must be worse than a murderer."

And she would not be comforted.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN THE DUSK.

THE dusk was gathering, and the lamplighters were beginning their evening round when Lisbeth reached the gate of the church to which Frank had referred, a well-known Kensington church, where it was easy to fix a meeting. She had left Alys in the nurse's hands, and had said that she wanted a little fresh air before dinner,—not that there was any particular need to account for her movements. She was quite independent; for Edmund was out all day, and Mrs. Creighton refused to come to the house so long as Miss Verrall stayed. Julian was abroad with her husband, or she would have come at once; as it was, she wrote loving and sympathetic letters, with kind messages from Lord Raynflete, but could not return home for a month or two.

Lisbeth stopped at the church gate and waited. Then a man stepped out of the shadows and confronted her. For a moment she shrank back with a sinking heart. Was this Frank? His face was haggard and worn, his eyes sunken, he had an indescribably haunted look. But she knew him when he spoke.

"Well, Lisbeth," he said, with a bitter intonation, "so even you do not know me?"

"Indeed I do," she answered, and held out both her hands. After a moment's hesitation, he grasped them in his own, and she saw that his lip quivered.

"Forgive me; I thought that you too were going to give me up."

"Too!" she repeated. "Who else?"

He answered by a look of reproach. "I have not forgotten," he said quietly. "I never shall forget."

A stab of pain made Lisbeth wince a little. Her love was very generous; but she was a woman still.

"Shall we walk on?" she asked after a short pause. "We can get into the Gardens almost directly. Mr. Creigh-

ton showed me the way. I daresay you know it. We can talk quietly there."

He acquiesced, and walked beside her, without speaking until they reached the green shades of the avenue, which twilight was obscuring. Then he asked a question—

"How is she?"

"Very weak and ill. A trifle better than she was yesterday, perhaps. I think that when the funeral is over——"

"When is it to be?"

"To-morrow. It has been a great shock to her, Frank."

"I suppose so. She knows now how it feels to have done a terrible thing without intention. Has it made her more merciful to me?"

"That is just what I wanted to tell you, Frank. She is bitterly repentant. Now she says she understands. Before —her eyes were blinded by fear and cowardice and prejudice. It would have been almost a relief to her to be condemned and punished for what she calls—her crime. Yet it was no crime, but pure accident, as was also Zadock Verrall's death. Oh, Frank, you know I always understood that." Lisbeth put her hand upon his arm.

"I know you did, Lisbeth, dear and true, as you always were; but she left me to my fate."

"I don't deny it," said Lisbeth, in a low, pained tone; "but I want you to understand, Frank, that she has awakened to a sense of her wrong-doing, and—if she knew that you were near her—would only beg to be allowed to throw herself at your feet, and beg for your forgiveness."

"It is easy to ask forgiveness," said Frank with a stern smile, "but it is not so easy to forget what you have suffered, in a prison cell, herded with criminals—disgraced, forsaken, condemned. I have never acknowledged and never will acknowledge the justice of that sentence, Lisbeth, and it is all the bitterer to me because Alys herself contributed to bring it about."

"Not knowingly."

"There is an old quotation which will serve my turn very well: 'Evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as

want of heart.' She did her utmost to condemn me to a prison. I love her—yes, to my cost, I love her still; but I cannot profess that I am sorry for her in her grief. It is a strange piece of retribution, that she should suffer exactly as I suffered—whom she could not love because I had blood on my hands."

"It is retribution indeed. So much so that you might well be content. You would not wish her to be punished more?"

"Nay, I wish her no punishment at all. I hope she will learn mercy to others through her own suffering."

His tone was hard. Something in him had changed; this was a bitter, almost a desperate man, not the gentle *dilettante* in art and music whom Lisbeth had once known. The lover of her youth was dead; and yet she loved the man better still.

"Frank," she said, gently, "she has suffered and repented. It is not only the shock of her child's death, but the conviction of her heart that has changed her. Soon after she was married, she came to know how she had wronged you; and she has never had a happy moment since."

"Does she not love her husband?" Frank asked, with a quick, darting glance.

"That has nothing to do with it," Lisbeth answered, valiantly. "The point is that she has discovered her mistake, her cowardice, her untruth to you, long before this terrible event happened; and she has been repenting of it ever since. Think of this, and do not be too hard on her."

"Oh, I am not hard on her," said he quietly. "I comprehend her now. She had a shallow nature, in spite of her lovely face; and one takes a little time in finding it out. As for her repentance—how has she shown it? I read in the papers that she is a society dame—a lady who is always at grand parties, and leaves her household to take care of itself, and her child to die of neglect. There is a long article about it in to-day's *Verity*. I would advise you to read it."

"Surely you know," cried Lisbeth, stung by his tone, "that gaiety will not cure the aching of a wounded heart."

He smiled.

"That sounds sentimental, Lisbeth, and I always thought that you were so matter-of-fact. Well, I have learnt all that I wanted to know. I am so besotted on her still, you see, that I could not make up my mind to cross the seas, without knowing whether she was better. You say that she is better. Well, that is right. If she had died of her child's death, I think I could have forgiven her."

"You are very hard, Frank. Is death the only way to soften you? They have feared for her brain; and that would be a worse fate than death."

"Yes," he said, and looked down.

It seemed to her that she had made an impression.

"She is not out of danger yet. I do not know how things will turn out; but even you, Frank, can hardly have suffered more than she has done."

"I am a brute," he said suddenly. He stopped short in the quiet road, and looked far away into the darkness. "God forgive me!" he ejaculated under his breath. "What is my pain that I should make such a rout about it, compared to hers? Lisbeth, this prison life has demoralised me. I have raged like a wild beast. I have sickened and sulked like a caged animal will do. I have had no care for anything or anybody but myself. The very way you speak proves to me how low I have fallen. To remind me of my sufferings in that way."

"I did not mean to hurt you, Frank," Lisbeth said meekly. She did not quite understand the mingled pain and pathos of his answer. But she felt that the ice was giving way—the hard rock yielding—that there was some gracious change.

"I should not have spoken in this way in the old days, I suppose," he went on ruminatingly. "I was more generous, I suppose. Yes, I am sorry for her, she has been punished, as you say. What am I that I should wish to add one iota

to the weight she has laid upon herself? Lisbeth, I take back what I said."

"I knew you would," she said, with tears in her eyes. "You would not wish to hurt her more, if you saw how broken-down she is. Tell me that you forgive her, Frank, that I may know you still to be all that I ever thought——"

"Ah Lisbeth, but you never thought well of me."

"Indeed I did. I lied if I said otherwise. You were always the first and best of men to me."

Then she stopped short and bit her lip. What had she said? Would he not gather from her unguarded words how great was her love for him?

But Frank had never been given to vanity, and the idea that Lisbeth cared for him otherwise than as a sister had not penetrated his mind. Her refusal of him in the old days had been too decided, her rebuffs too absolute, to lead him to form visions of that kind. Besides, his thoughts were still centred on Alys.

"I always knew," Lisbeth went on more soberly, "how much good there was in you, and that it needed only a spur now and then to bring it out."

"There is not much good now, Lisbeth."

"There is as much as ever, and capabilities of more," she said firmly; "because you have suffered, and are a stronger man."

"I have suffered certainly; whether I am stronger or not, only time can show."

"You are showing it now; you are going to show it now."

"Am I?" he said, a little sadly. "Well, tell me how?"

"You will forgive Alys the injury she did you—that is the first thing. That is the great thing, because the thought that she had injured you and did not care has been embittering your mind for the last two years. But that is over, is it not? You will try to forgive and forget?"

"Yes," he said gravely; "I will try."

"Then—will the next thing be so hard? Frank, you must give up your project of going to America."

"That is too hard for me. What else can I do?"

"If you go," said Lisbeth, with fine diplomacy, "you must go later on, and in a proper way. Have you thought of your mother?"

"Yes; she is to meet me in Liverpool. I did not mean to go without bidding her good-bye, Lisbeth," he said, in something of an injured tone.

"I should think not. But what is that? Oh Frank, I did not think you would be so cruel to your mother."

"I am not cruel. It is inevitable, I must go."

"You must go because you cannot make up your mind to bear the pain, the humiliation, of coming home again amongst people, who, you think, will always be remembering the past against you! I do not call it manly to run away."

"It is not running away. It is the most obvious thing in the world that I must go. Why, I believe I remember you saying to me once that if I would go out to the colonies and do some honest work there, you would respect me."

"Very likely; because you had no duties at home," said Lisbeth, with sudden warmth. "But things are changed now. Your mother is much broken in health, her sight is failing, and she is very feeble. You ought not to desert her. You have caused her—unintentionally, I know,—a great deal of grief and pain; do you mean to say that you have no duty towards her now? To my mind you ought to stay at home, and be a son and daughter to her for the rest of her days. You may even bring home a daughter to her one of these days."

"Never, Lisbeth! I could never ask a woman to bear my name now."

"That is nonsense. A woman who loved you would be proud to bear it, and would love you the better for the trouble you have been passing through."

"Would she? I do not know such women."

"Because your eyes are blind. Again, there's Moor End and the estate. Who is to look after them when you are gone?"

"There is not much to look after," said the young man, shrugging his shoulders.

"But you would not like the old house to pass into the hands of strangers? And it is not a question of liking," said Lisbeth, with passionate emphasis; "it is a question of right and wrong. Your duty to your mother should be the first thing in the world to you now."

They walked on in silence for a few moments. Then Frank said, in a gloomy tone—

"It's no use, Lisbeth, I couldn't do it. It makes me mad to stay in England. These London streets are torture to me now."

"But on the moors——"

"It would be worse. I must go. You are wrong in saying I am stronger for the past. I am very weak. I shall do no good until I am far away."

"You are putting yourself first."

"I suppose I always did," he said, rather bitterly. "It's too late to alter. I must go."

Lisbeth sighed deeply. "You are wrong," she said, "and you will see it some day. However, I see it is no use saying anything more. I must turn back now, Frank. I am so glad to have seen you again."

"I could not have left England without coming to say good-bye," said Frank affectionately.

Lisbeth made no answer, and they walked on together in silence for a little time. Then Frank, in glancing sideways at his companion, saw the gleam of tears upon her cheek. He laid his hand upon her arm.

"Lisbeth—are those tears for me?"

"I am sorry you are going," she said, quickly; "you would not wish me to be otherwise. I have lost so many friends lately that I feel the loss of another to be a misfortune."

"I may come back," he said, rather falteringly.

"Nay, one cannot count on that. Besides, if you came, it is as another man, with new friends and new interests. That is the way—the man goes out into the world, while the

women sit at home; like Lady Adela at Moor End, and Lisbeth Verrall at Quest. It's lonely work."

"You make me wish I could ask you to come with me," said Frank, half lightly, half sadly. "You would be a capital comrade, Lisbeth, a helpmate for any man if he did not happen to have a stain upon his name."

The words leaped to her lips, "What do I care for any stain upon your name?" but she held them back. She would not throw herself at him, she would not place herself in any position of humiliation. She walked on with head erect, and a hot colour burning in her cheeks. She looked very handsome, but so dignified that Frank fancied her offended. He resumed in a different tone—

"I assure you, Lisbeth, I do not think that my mother will object to my leaving England—at least, for a time. If there were any real reason for my staying, I would try to stay. But it would be intensely painful to me, and I cannot see that it would be an advantage to my mother. My one desire is to get away."

"I hope you will be successful," she answered gravely; "but I do not think that you are quite right to go. However, you must be the judge of that. And are we to say good-bye now? or will you see me again before you go?"

"Yes, let me see you again," he implored. "I have still another day before I need meet my mother in Liverpool. If I see you again you can tell me how Alys is."

"I will meet you at the same hour to-morrow, in the same place,—if that will do."

"Yes, yes. That is good of you, Lisbeth, good and kind as you always are! How I have longed for a sight of your face—how I shall long again when I am far away!"

"Don't come any further," said she, stopping and holding out her hand. It was unendurable to her to hear him say kind and friendly things any longer. She wanted so much more—so much that he would not and could not give. "Good-bye; I am nearly at the house now, and some one might see us."

"Good-bye," he said. "Thank you for meeting me to-

night. I was nearly in despair, and you have cheered me. You will cheer me again before I go."

"If I can," she said, with a grave smile, as they separated. And for the rest of the way home, the lighted streets were to Lisbeth's tear-dimmed eyes only a dazzling blur.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A STRONG APPEAL.

Lisbeth did not sit up with Alys that night, and the nurse took her place. But she stayed with her the greater part of the next day, and did her best to comfort her during the sad hour when the little child's coffin was borne away to its resting place, and when the house seemed strangely silent after the departure of mourners and hired helpers, and the trampling of horses' hoofs in the quiet street below.

"It is all over then," the bereaved mother said at last, with a weary sigh.

"You will see her again," said Lisbeth.

"Shall I? I don't know. I am not good enough. And I don't want to die. I am afraid."

Yet she looked as white and frail as she lay with her hands stretched out straight before her, and her eyes heavy with weeping and fever and sleeplessness, that a shudder passed through Lisbeth's frame at the words of fear. Alys might not, perhaps, be seriously ill, but she looked as if it would take very little to end her span of life.

"There is nothing to fear," said Lisbeth, "if you can trust God."

"You were always good," Alys answered faintly, "but I don't think I ever was. Oh my little baby, my poor little darling that I killed! Shall I really see her again?"

And then she burst into passionate tears, and Lisbeth had a hard task in quieting and consoling her.

"You will see Edmund to-day, will you not?" she asked

by and by, when Alys had reached a quieter mood. "When he comes back, he will be tired and sad,—you will see him, then?"

"He will not want to come," said Alys, turning her face away. And when Lisbeth urged that he had several times entreated permission to enter the sick room, she only answered with her old wailing cry, "I am afraid, I am afraid. I am always afraid."

It seemed as if her whole being had been usurped by fear.

Lisbeth let the subject drop, and spoke of other things, trying to draw her sister's mind away from the topics that were so painful to her. But Alys was not easy to distract or amuse. Her mind ran persistently on the evil of her own doings, the uselessness of her existence, the unhappiness of her future.

"If you thought of others rather than of yourself," Lisbeth said at last, with a touch of severity, "you would find things easier to bear."

"I do think of others, I am thinking of poor Frank," said Alys, whose tears were set flowing as she spoke.

Lisbeth hesitated a little before she said—"I may as well tell you, I saw Mr. Moor last night."

"You saw him? Where?"

"Out of doors. I talked to him a little while. He is going to America."

Alys's eyes asked eagerly for more.

"He is to meet his mother at Liverpool in a day or two, and say good-bye to her."

"Will he never come back?"

"He says he may; but I should think not."

"Oh, poor Frank!" said Alys pitifully. And then for a time she lay quite still.

"Did he speak of me?" she asked at length.

"Yes."

"Lisbeth, tell me—was he very angry—very bitter?"

"He was, at first. But afterwards he said he was sorry for you; he said he forgave you any injury that you had done him."

She could not help making her tone dry, and her manner cold. She had begged Frank to pardon Alys, but sometimes she had difficulty in pardoning her herself.

"I am glad he forgave me," said Alys in a soft voice, and then for a time she lay perfectly still, and Lisbeth's heart misgave her as to whether she had done a right thing in repeating to her what Frank had said. But it had certainly had the desired effect of diverting her mind from the death of her child and the other painful circumstances of her lot.

"Lisbeth," she asked at last, "do you think he ought to go to America?"

"No; I think it is his duty to stay at home, and take care of his mother. I told him so, but I could not convince him."

"Why does he want to go?"

"Because he feels life so painful to him in England. His career is over—he is a marked man; he does not think he could bear the position. I think it would be wiser and manlier if he tried to live down evil report, and prove himself a good son, and a good manager of the estate. I am very sorry he is going."

"Poor Lisbeth! You will never see him again, then."

"It is not poor Lisbeth, it is poor Lady Adela," exclaimed Lisbeth, with sudden heat. "She is the person to be pitied. She adores her son, and he has not only brought this grief upon her, but now deserts her in her old age, and when she is growing blind—just because he will not bear a little pain. Oh, why are people so cowardly and so weak?" cried Lisbeth, in the bitterness of her heart.

"It must be beautiful to be strong and brave—like you," said Alys, watching her, with a new look in her eyes. "We cannot help our weakness, I suppose."

"Oh yes, we can," said Lisbeth, passionately, "if only we care enough to help other people we can be as strong and brave as we like."

"Can you not help him?"

"No; he will not let me."

There was a pause, and Lisbeth shaded her eyes with her

hand, so that her sister should not see her face. Alys lay very still.

"Shall you see him again?"

"Yes, to-night."

"Then—do you think he would still do anything for my sake? Lisbeth, I will be brave, and send him a message if you will give it."

"I will give it, if I think it a right message."

"Tell him, then, that he must stay in England—for my sake. Not that we shall ever meet again; not that he need ever remember me; but because—because he has said that he forgave me. If he forgives, he will not give me the added misery of knowing that I have helped to drive him out of England, and that his mother is pining for him while he is far away. By the memory of that little child of mine, Lisbeth, tell him he must not leave his mother all alone. For my sake, and because he forgives me, I ask him to stay. Will you tell him this?"

"Yes, I will tell him that. But I do not think, Alys dear, he will stay. And if I give him that message, will you do one thing for me?"

"What is it?"

"See Edmund when he comes back, and be good to him."

"I suppose it must come some time," said Alys, with a little nervous shiver. "I am a coward—as you say. But—I will see him, if you like. He can but kill me once."

"He is ready to love you as much as you will let him. You should try to be more than ever to him now," said Lisbeth; and although Alys closed her eyes and turned her head wearily away, she thought there was a glimmer of interest, almost of pleasure, in the delicate pale face. She wished heartily that Edmund would come at once, while Alys was in this better mood.

But the time passed on, and still he did not appear.

After tea, Lisbeth was forced, rather against her will, to leave Alys to the nurse's care, while she went out to meet Francis Moor at the old church gate. She found him waiting for her; and although the covering was damp, and there

was a white mist in the air, they turned at once into the gardens where they had held their previous conversation. And there, after a little preliminary talk, Lisbeth told him Alys's message, and waited anxiously for his reply.

"It is a strong appeal," he said, in a low moved voice; and then was silent for a time.

"She asks a good deal," he went on presently. "She asks me to give up all my chances of good work and future happiness, and to stay with my poor mother. Is that the thing to do, I wonder? It may be. I have thought the matter over until I hardly know right from wrong."

But Lisbeth thought that a manlier tone underlay the doubtful speech. She waited; she began to hope.

"Yes; she makes a strong appeal," he said.

"Your conscience supports it," Lisbeth said quietly.

"Does it? I am not quite sure. Well, there is no help for it. I cannot refuse her. I cannot think of you going back and telling her I will not do what she commands. I am faithful to her, you see, although she treated me so scurvily. But she is right, I have seen it all day long—and ever since you spoke to me. Yes, tell her then that I will stay."

"Oh, Frank, I am so glad."

"Glad, are you?—when I feel as if I had promised to cut my throat. It is for my mother's sake, after all—when she is gone, Lisbeth, I shall feel myself free to go where I choose,—you must tell Alys that."

"Lady Adela will live for many years yet, please God," said Lisbeth, with gentle seriousness. "And in time you will be glad that you have done what is right."

They talked on for some time, planning his future life a little, and speaking of the things that yet remained. Lisbeth's solid, cheerful good sense brought him more hope and comfort than he had imagined possible. And when they retraced their footsteps, their hearts were warm although the night was chill, and the rain blown into their faces by the driving wind.

They came to a crowded crossing, which they had to

traverse before they reached the turning that led to Edmund's house. Lisbeth crossed it timorously; she was not used to London streets, and was glad to have Frank as a protection. But when she reached the other side, she heard a shout and turned—just in time to see a scramble of horses and men and wheels that made her feel sick with terror. Some one had fallen in the slippery road; and another man had rushed to his rescue and dragged him into safety, but only to be trampled on by a wildly passing pair of horses and touched by a passing wheel. Lisbeth had much ado to collect her scattered senses, even when she became conscious that the man rescued was Edmund Creighton, and that the rescuer, now lying bleeding and unconscious in the road, was Francis Moor.

There was a crowd and a tumult, and she found herself bending over Frank's prostrate body, and holding something to his lips, while Edmund stood by with a scared, bewildered white face. "He's not dead, is he? Surely he is not dead," he said, scarcely knowing what he said. And Lisbeth answered, with a composure that amazed herself—"No, I think he is not dead."

Then the ambulance came up and there was some talk of the nearest hospital—St. George's seemed to be the best. "Why not to my house?" said Edmund loudly. "He is a friend of mine——"

But Lisbeth put her hand upon his arm. "No," she said, "not to your house. He would not like it, Edmund. Let him go to the hospital; he will be better there."

She did not prevent him, however, from accompanying her to the hospital in a cab, and making every possible arrangement for Frank's comfort as a private patient. It was perhaps as well, she thought, that he should feel compunction and compassion towards the man whom he had wronged and despised; although she did not expect either to be so strongly marked.

The injuries were somewhat serious, but not immediately dangerous. Unless inflammation should supervene; and there was no necessity—no possibility, in fact—for Lisbeth to

stay, as she would have dearly liked to do. She had a smile from the injured man before she went; but Edmund would not come forward, he kept well out of sight, and would not meet Frank's eye. And finally he rather hurried Lisbeth away, saying that Alys would be anxious, and that they would come again upon the morrow. They telegraphed to Lady Adela on their way back to Campden Hill.

"Alys was expecting you," Lisbeth said, when they stood under the hall, and she had time to remember the things that had happened before she left the house. "You will go to her, will you not?"

"Go to her first," said Edmund, "and tell her what has happened. I can't. He saved my life, you know."

"I know."

"I was never a friend of his. Alys knows that. Go and tell her. She must know."

And he hurried into a dressing-room, where he could wash the traces of his fall from face and hands, and change his clothes before presenting himself in his wife's room. He was half inclined not to go. He had a strong suspicion that Alys had loved Frank more than she would ever care for him; and he saw that this act of courage and self-devotion might tend to restore him to the higher place in her estimation. Alys was a good woman, he said to himself, and he was not vulgarly, foolishly jealous; but he would rather have been saved by any other hand than that of Francis Moor.

It was with a white impassive face, which marked his emotions very successfully, that he at last made his way into Alys's room. He had not seen her since the day of the child's death, when she had been carried fainting from the nursery. At another moment he would have felt painfully nervous. Now, the thought of Frank's action gave him courage to confront a difficult occasion.

Alys's large frightened eyes met his, and then she gave a little cry. There was something in his look which startled her, and which yet made her not afraid of him. Almost

involuntarily, she stretched out her hands; and Edmund, coming close to her, took her in his arms. Seeing this, Lisbeth beckoned to the nurse, and husband and wife were left alone.

"Edmund, can you forgive me?"

"My love, my darling, my poor white bud, there is no question of forgiveness between you and me."

She sighed and nestled closer. She had thought that she did not love him. The restfulness that his love inspired in her, made her wonder whether she might not be happy with him after all.

"You have heard," he said presently, in rather broken tones.

"Yes, Lisbeth told me."

"I owe him my life."

"And we treated him so badly—at least, I did—Edmund, I have been miserable about him; yet, Lisbeth says he has forgiven me."

Edmund was silent, but he pressed her a little closer, and she felt the sympathy that he did not speak.

"I was cruel to him," pursued Alys. "I said he had blood on his hands, and now—my own—my own! Oh, Edmund, our poor little girl!" And then she burst into tears, and sobbed out her grief upon his bosom.

"I was to blame, too," said Edmund, in sombre tones. Even now he could not bring himself to say anything about the knife—that tiny scrap of testimony which might have been counted towards Frank's acquittal, if all the story had been correctly told. It was too hard for him to confess to Alys how far he had been wrong. But in the light of Frank's deed of generous daring, Edmund knew himself to have done a base thing; and for the first time in his life he thoroughly condemned himself. His first task, however, was to soothe and comfort his fragile, ailing wife, who clung to him as if he were a very tower of strength.

"If you could but love me a little, Alys," he murmured at last into her ear.

"I will," she said. "If I never did before, Edmund, I will love you now."

And perhaps she was already nearer loving than she knew.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN HOSPITAL.

LISBETH went to see Frank next day, but was not allowed to stay very long. He was scarcely conscious, and suffered great pain whenever consciousness returned; she could do nothing for him, and envied the nurses whose task it was to wait upon the patients. It would have been her greatest pleasure in life to nurse him back to life and health; but this was denied her. All that she could do was to be unobtrusively useful in small ways, such as arranging to meet Lady Adela at the station, and looking out lodgings for her near the hospital, in case she wished to stay there rather than with friends.

Edmund offered, rather doubtfully, to go with her to the station, but Lisbeth declined his escort. She knew that the name of Creighton was not acceptable in Lady Adela's ears; for, with the inconsistency of a haughty and somewhat overbearing nature, the mother had never forgiven Alys for deserting her son and marrying Edmund Creighton, even though she did not want the girl as her own daughter-in-law. And Lisbeth knew the feeling, without quite understanding it. But it was characteristic of Lisbeth to know and respect a great many feelings and fancies which she did not understand. And therefore she quietly got rid of Edmund's company as soon as she could.

At the hour when Lady Adela had telegraphed that she would arrive, Lisbeth was on the platform at Euston station, awaiting her. Her eye, roving up and down the carriages as the train steamed in, soon found the person whom she sought. Lady Adela alighted slowly and rather feebly

from a first-class carriage, leaning on the arm of a confidential maid. Her eyesight was still available for purposes of ordinary movement, although she had almost ceased to be able to read or write; but she was nervous about railway travelling, and had not dared to come alone. Lisbeth's heart yearned over her, and she saw the signs of failing strength in her slow uncertain movement, and the tightness with which she clung to Martha Morris's faithful arm. It would have been a delight to Lisbeth to minister to Frank's mother in every possible way, almost as great a delight as to minister to him, and she was glad to think that she could render her any service.

She stepped forward through the crowd, and touched Martha on the arm, then addressed herself with peculiar respectfulness to Lady Adela.

"Good evening, my lady; I am glad you are able to come to see Mr. Frank."

She did not usually say "my lady," and she did not usually say "Mr. Frank"; but instinct told her that Lady Adela would like her better as the farmer's grand-daughter in London, than as the Miss Verrall of Quest, about whom the Creighton's buzzed in somewhat scornful admiration. And she was right. Lady Adela did not feel so lonely in the crowd when some one came up and spoke to her as the country people spoke to her about Moor End.

"Oh, it is you, is it, Lisbeth Verrall?" she said, holding out her hand. "That is very nice; you have come to meet me, I suppose. Most kind of you—or are you here only on your own business?"

"I came to meet you, my lady. Martha, you can go and see about the boxes, please, while I wait here with my lady. You will find us here when you come back."

"Very well, Miss Verrall," said Martha, civilly enough, for she had known Lisbeth all her life, and had a good deal of respect for her. But there was a new idea in Martha's mind as she went to look for the luggage. "Well, Lisbeth Verrall is come out, to be sure! She looks just like a lady. And yet her things are plain enough, as far as I could see,

and all black, too. But she's as well dressed as my lady, and looks rare an' handsome as ever she did. My lady might see her son choosing worse."

Which shows that Martha had heard the current gossip in her northern home.

Lady Adela was too dim-sighted to take note of Lisbeth's dress: but she was struck by the grace of the tall figure, the refinement of the strong, clear-cut features, and the beauty of her sweet expression. One would never think that she was a country girl, thought the aristocratic lady, glancing at her. Yet Lisbeth's long black cloak and small close bonnet were almost as plain as those of a hospital nurse; it was only the smaller details of her dress that betrayed her. The cloak was lined with silk, and edged with soft black fur; the belt of her dress was clasped with a finely wrought silver buckle—a gift from Alys, by the way; her gloves and boots were unexceptionable. Lisbeth always had a taste for perfection in small matters as well as great, and these were the things that gave the impression of refinement and distinction, although most of them were lost in Lady Adela's half blind eyes.

"How did you know, Lisbeth? Why did you come?" she said, clinging to Lisbeth's arm, half nervously.

"I went with Mr. Frank to the hospital, my lady, and it was I who sent you the telegram."

"What has happened to him?"

"It was a very brave and noble act," said Lisbeth, her eye kindling. "He saw a man in danger of being run over —knocked down by the horses and on the point of being trampled on, and he sprang forward to help him. Then he was knocked down himself—and hurt."

"Oh, Lisbeth, much hurt?"

"He is suffering a good deal. But I think the injuries are not dangerous. The nurse says so."

"My dear, brave, noble boy!"

"That was not the best of it," said Lisbeth, speaking close to her ear, so that she should be distinctly heard, as the noise of the crowd swept by. "The best was, that the man he

saved was the man whom he once thought his enemy—who was his enemy in a certain sense—Mr. Edmund Creighton."

"The man that stole Alys away from him! My poor boy!"

"Then," said Lisbeth, concluding rather lamely, "Mr. Creighton and I took him to the nearest hospital. Mr. Creighton proposed to take him to his own house; but I thought you, my lady—and Mr. Frank, too—would not like it."

"No; you were quite right, Lisbeth. What a strange thing that you and Mr. Creighton should meet him in that way!" said Lady Adela, taking it for granted that Lisbeth and Edmund had been walking out together. Lisbeth halted a moment before replying, then went on composedly—

"I did not know what you would like to do about being near him, my lady; so I just looked at two or three sets of apartments in the neighbourhood, and I found one which I thought would suit you, if you would like to take it—quite near the hospital, so that you could go there every day."

"Oh, Lisbeth, what a good, thoughtful creature you are!" cried Lady Adela, effusively. "I was wondering what I should do, and wishing that I had telegraphed to the 'Victoria'—but even that is a good way off and it is very expensive. Martha would much prefer lodgings, I know."

"Shall we drive there at once?" said Lisbeth, smiling a little at this unconscious tribute to Martha's dominion over her mistress. "We might as well go there, and I can help Martha to unpack, for you will not be able to see him to-night."

"Not to-night? Must I wait till morning?"

"It is a good sign. He is not ill enough for friends to be admitted at all hours," said Lisbeth, cheerfully; and then, as Martha came up, followed by a porter, wheeling a truck with the luggage, she moved forward, too, and guided Lady Adela's footsteps to a four-wheeled cab.

At the door she hesitated. "Perhaps you would like to

go alone, my lady," she said quietly. "Shall Martha and I follow, with the boxes, in another cab?"

Martha glowered at the suggestion, which Lady Adela promptly negatived.

"Certainly not, Lisbeth; what nonsense! Get in at once. Sit by me, Martha will sit opposite. The boxes will go on the roof. What should we have done without Miss Verrall, Martha?"

"Indeed, my lady, Miss Verrall's always welcome wherever she goes," said Martha, primly; and she did not pay compliments without meaning them.

The jolting of the cab over the stones prevented any sustained conversation during the long drive from Euston, and Lady Adela was heartily tired of it long before the end. But she was extremely pleased with the lodgings that Lisbeth had found for her. They were clean, bright, and comfortable; and the landlady was a north-country woman, who knew Crosthwaite, and was proud to entertain the lady of Moor End. There could not have been a happier chance. Lady Adela was very gracious. She made Lisbeth sit down to tea with her, while Martha waited on them both. Curious to relate, Lisbeth had never before broken bread with the mother of the man she loved.

"And tell me all about it, Lisbeth," said Lady Adela, when Martha had retired to unpack the boxes, and Lisbeth was trusting that it was time for her to go. "Tell me how you saw him first; whether you recognised him before he was knocked down."

Lisbeth's cheeks flamed, but she answered courageously, "I had been speaking with Mr. Frank," she said, after a little pause.

"Speaking? Why, you don't mean to say that he entered into conversation with you when that Mr. Creighton was close by. I wonder at Frank—poor boy!" said Lady Adela, with indignation swelling into tenderness.

"No; Mr. Creighton was not there."

"I don't understand you, Lisbeth. Not there? I thought you were walking with Mr. Creighton."

"No; we were near his house, but I had not been walking with him. I had been walking a little way with Mr. Frank, and talking to him."

Then Lady Adela took the alarm. Her back stiffened visibly; she drew up her graceful neck, and elevated her chin, as she said—

"Oh, and how was that, may I ask?"

"Lady Adela," said Lisbeth, dropping the 'my lady' for the first time, "you know very well that Mr. Frank and I have always been great friends. And you know me well enough to be certain that no harm is likely to come of it."

"I know that, Lisbeth," said Lady Adela, in a softened voice.

"Before he went away he promised me to come to Quest again. I asked him to promise that, because he was talking wildly, and I thought he might be tempted; you know, my lady, when men are in sore straits, they do sometimes think they can end matters altogether with their life; and I was afraid for him, and also for you."

Lady Adela turned her face to the fire, and said nothing.

"So I made him promise to come back, at least once—to Quest. I thought that I might be able to cheer him up if he came, for he was in the habit of turning to me in his troubles, and I did not think it any wrong to you, my lady, to take his word for it. So he came to Quest—but I had gone away."

"He came to Quest? Since his return?——"

"Yes, he had promised; and he came."

"So near me, and yet I never saw him! Lisbeth, you had more influence than I."

Lisbeth shook her head. "It was just that he had given his word, and did not like to break it. Then, on finding that I was away, that I had not kept my part of the compact, so to speak, for I told him that I should be always there, he rushed off, never thinking of his home, and took the train for London. And then he read in a newspaper of my poor sister's mishap, and he knew where I had gone."

"Did he write to you?"

"Yes, my lady. He asked me to meet him, for he wanted to say good-bye before he set sail for America."

"Ah, that dreadful America! He cannot go just yet, at any rate."

"He is not going at all," said Lisbeth, in her sedate quiet tones. "He has given up the plan. He was going back to Moor End, my lady, to live with you."

Lady Adela looked up, her face irradiated with a mixture of pleasure and of pain. "Lisbeth, do I owe that to you?"

"No," said Lisbeth, curtly, "to Alys—not to me."

"To—Alys!"

"I tried my best. I told him of his duty, but he would not heed. And I told my sister, and she begged of him—if he forgave her for her fickleness—to stay in England. Then he gave way. No; it was not my doing—I wish it had been," said Lisbeth.

"Then he has not forgotten her—he has not got over it?" said Lady Adela, in a very low voice.

Lisbeth was silent, she could answer neither yea or nay.

"Oh, Lisbeth, if only he had never met her!" said Lady Adela, covering her face with her hands to hide her tears. "Oh, if at least she could have been true to him! I would not have opposed it now. I would have made her my dear daughter, if only she had been constant and true. She has broken his heart."

And again Lisbeth did not answer. Somehow, she felt as if Lady Adela were cruel to say all this to her. If that opposition, now so easily withdrawn, had not been feared in the first instance, Frank and Alys might have now been man and wife, Zadock might still be tramping about the farm at Quest, and Lisbeth herself—well, Lisbeth would have had the satisfaction of knowing that those she loved were happy; and that would have been joy enough for her.

She said good-night to Lady Adela as soon as she could, but promised to come next morning and go with her to the hospital. She found Alys restless and uneasy at her long absence, but on the whole decidedly better. It had been de-

cided that she was to go abroad with her husband, as soon as she was strong enough to be moved; and she seemed to take some pleasure in the prospect. "When I get into the sunshine," she repeated more than once, "I shall get well, as I did before."

The first visit paid by Lady Adela to her son was not altogether a success. No doubt it was to her a very trying occasion. She had not seen him for two years at all: and to find him stretched upon a hospital bed, suffering severe pain, and almost too weak to speak to her, was more than she knew how to bear. She wept over him, and disturbed him so much that the nurse had to suggest her departure, and remarked to Lisbeth that the lady must not come unless she could exercise a little more self-control. Lisbeth got Lady Adela away, but herself came back, and sat with Frank for a little while. It was not long, indeed, before the nurse remarked that Miss Verrall's presence had a remarkably soothing effect upon the patient. He was always quieter and cooler when she had been sitting beside him, and slept more restfully, whereas his mother's visits roused and irritated him rather more than was advisable.

"You are not a relation of his, are you?" said one of the nurses to Lisbeth, one afternoon.

"No, only a friend."

"Not engaged to him, or anything? Excuse my asking, but you have such an extraordinary influence over him. It's like magnetism. If you were nursing him all the time, he would get well twice as fast, I believe."

"I have been told sometimes that I am a pretty good nurse," said Lisbeth, with a smile.

"Yes; but I did not mean that. I meant that you seemed to have a peculiar power over him. But you would make a capital nurse. Why don't you come here and train?"

"I never thought of it," said Lisbeth; but it was an idea which possessed a certain charm for her. Lately it had appeared to her more than ever impossible that she should continue to live at Quest. She had remained there during

the period of Frank's imprisonment, chiefly from that vague romantic desire that he should find her there when he came back again; but when once he was back—settled at Moor End, with no need for her—the position would become intolerable.

Why should she not let Quest, or even sell it, and take up some other interest in life? There was no reason why she should stay in a place which bristled with painful memories, and when the old wounds were likely to be torn open again at any moment. She might come to London; she would have enough to live upon; and give her time to nursing and good works. She would be near Alys, and she could put Francis Moor out of her thoughts better in London than at Quest. If she were at Quest, his mother would take care that she saw very little of him, and why should she expose herself unnecessarily to insult and rebuff?

Not that Lady Adela was rude or unkind. Only, as time went on, and Frank grew rather better, the mother showed pretty clearly that she did not want other visitors than she considered herself sufficient for her son. She made Lisbeth feel herself in the way. She was never uncivil, but she became cold. Even although Frank's eyes lighted up at the sight of Lisbeth, and the nurses declared that she did him more good than all the doctors, Lady Adela was undisguisedly jealous of her. She did not think that Frank was likely to fall in love with Lisbeth; but she began to find it absurd that he should call a farmer's grand-daughter his "friend." What friendship was really possible between the master of Moor End and the lowlier mistress of Quest?

As soon as it was possible, Lady Adela swept her son back to Moor End, with a trained nurse, on whom she relied implicitly. But she said no word to Lisbeth about coming to see him when she too returned to Crosthwaite. And Lisbeth noted the omission with a set lip and a troubled eye.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

EDMUND MAKES AMENDS.

Lisbeth remained in London until Alys left England with her husband. It was astonishing to most people that Edmund Creighton should throw up his work so suddenly and so completely for the sake of his invalid wife; and many persons said that his career would be entirely ruined; but Lisbeth was not surprised. Underneath a demeanour which was coolly complacent to the verge of smugness, beneath an exterior of perfect conventionality and correctness, she had distinguished something more,—a capacity for love, which had long been overlaid by the artificial conditions of his life, but which Alys had brought to the surface, and which had, for the present at least, become the ruling motive of his existence.

Slowly and steadily it had been gaining ground. And as an unselfish love tends in the long run to purify and ennoble, it follows that Edmund Creighton was now a better man than he had been when he first made love to pretty Alys Lorimer in her father's house. It was a love that gathered strength from opposition. When his mother first manifested her dislike to Alys, his affection had been but weak; when she was poor and oppressed, it grew stronger; and when she actually refused him for another man, it became an overmastering force. No doubt love of power had something to do with its development; he was a man who could not bear to be beaten. And when he had a chance of out-manœuvring his rival, he availed himself of it without remorse. The remorse—if one can call the regret which was beginning to gather force within his bosom by as definite a name—started into being with the sight of Alys's strong feeling on the subject; with the unexpected death of his child; with the discovery that he owed his life to the man whom he had wronged. Edmund was not an impulsive man, and it took him some time to find all these things out.

But he had some sort of rudimentary conscience; and when it took to growing it showed him something of the truth.

Love and remorse are two potent factors to enter willy-nilly into a man's life. They have a way of reversing things, which is neither profitable nor pleasant. It was not to Edmund's advantage to leave London for his wife's sake at that particular time of the year; and yet he did it, because it dawned upon him that he loved her better than his own advantage. He knew that his absence for a few weeks would not ruin him, though it would not by any means advance his career. But for Alys's sake he would risk even his worldly prosperity—perhaps the thing that had been dearest to him all his life before.

And there was another matter that troubled him. Francis Moor, lying crippled and disabled at St. George's Hospital, having risked his life to save that of Edmund Creighton, who had robbed him of the woman he loved and done his best to ruin him—this was a picture which he did not like to look upon. And yet it was imperative that he should see Frank Moor before he went back to Moor End; it would be out of the question to let him leave London without a word of thanks. So, groaning in spirit, Edmund went to the hospital the day before Frank's departure. He had told Lisbeth that he meant to go, and asked her to get him five minutes with Frank alone. "For I don't think I can stand the mother; she used to scowl at me so tremendously when we were at Crosthwaite," he observed.

Lisbeth smiled. "I am glad that you are going to see Mr. Moor."

"You had better ask him beforehand whether he objects. Of course there is no reason why he should object," said Edmund, assuming his most flippant air. "I shall not detain him five minutes, it is a purely formal business, but it would scarcely be handsome to let him go north without assuring him of my gratitude, would it?"—and he laughed rather nervously.

"I think you are quite right," said Lisbeth, discerning something unusually serious behind the air of badinage.

But she hardly knew what to say when Frank, with a sick man's irritability, tried to decline the visit altogether.

"What does he want to see me for? It's absurd. Thanks between him and me are a ridiculous formality. For heaven's sake, Lisbeth, keep the fellow out of my sight."

But it was too late. Mr. Creighton had taken it for granted that Lisbeth had made all preliminary arrangements, and was now ushered into the room by a nurse.

Frank fell back on his pillow with something between a grunt and a groan. He eyed Edmund with distaste. He had no liking for Alys's husband, even if he had involuntarily saved his life. And he wished Lisbeth would not go. She could always protect him better than anybody else, because she seemed to know instinctively how he felt. But she had already gone, and he and Edmund Creighton were alone.

"I must beg your pardon for intruding," said the visitor stiffly. "I heard that you were leaving the hospital very shortly, and I thought I should like to see you for a moment, and to express my thanks for the action, which—which has had such very unfortunate results."

"I am much obliged to you," said Frank, feeling slightly incensed. "But there is no occasion to express any thanks at all. I suppose that you understand that the action, as you call it, would have been performed for a tramp just as soon as for yourself."

"I quite understand that it was not from a personal motive. You would have been better pleased to save the tramp."

"I am afraid there is no use denying it. I was actuated by no sublime motive of pure beneficence towards you, as some of the women seem to think. If I had seen your face —I might never have moved an inch."

"I am glad you say so," said Edmund, coldly; "for it makes my position much less unendurable."

"Unendurable?" said Frank, eyeing him steadily. "I think I fail to grasp your meaning."

"I don't know that it is of much use to say any more. I felt that I owed you an apology—that was all. If you disclaim all desire of benefiting me—well, perhaps I was wrong, and I will not apologise after all."

"I was not aware that you had anything to apologise for," said Frank, knitting his brows. It struck him as atrocious that Edmund should "apologise" for robbing him of Alys, which was what he understood by these enigmatical words. But Edmund had an entirely different meaning, which he now endeavoured to make plain.

"Of course, you are not aware of it," he said. "There is no need for me to tell you—except that I feel I shall be more of a man if I do it—that perhaps I owe you the truth. It is just this—I believe now that I once misjudged and misrepresented you. What I then said had some effect on the mind of another, and if another misjudged you, it was more my fault than—hers."

"I always thought so," said Frank. "Pray say no more. I appreciate your motive, but there is no use in calling up these old memories."

His face was pale, but Edmund's was still paler.

"I did not say it to give you pleasure, Mr. Moor. I tell you the truth for my own benefit. It was a selfish motive, I acknowledge. Yet I have something else to say."

His voice grew so hoarse that Frank looked at him in amaze, and as he went on speaking, a hot colour flushed his brow. It seemed as if what he said cost him a prodigious effort, and he scarcely knew how to get out the words.

"I have told Alys she wishes me to say it too. I fear I must make same allusion to a painful subject, for which, I hope, you will pardon me. At the trial, some mention was made of a knife . . . you know the knife I mean. It was denied that the man Verrall possessed such a knife, or had been seen to handle it. I had seen him with it in his hand, and had heard him threaten you with it; but I held my tongue."

"You were there," said Frank slowly; "you heard the evidence; you knew the effect such a piece of evidence

would have had on the minds of the jury? and you held your tongue?"

"Yes," said Edmund. He was white again now, white to the very lips. "I wish to say," he added hurriedly, "that I am perfectly willing now to publish a statement of the fact, and leave the public to think what they will of me. It would no doubt cause a great revolution of feeling in your favour, although the verdict could not be reversed. I don't suppose it would affect the law, of course; but it would affect public opinion."

"I think it would affect public opinion of you rather than of me," said Frank quietly.

"I think it might. I am prepared for that."

"Prepared for that! Why, good Lord, man, it would make you a public laughing stock, or worse. It would mean ruin to your career."

"Possibly. Isn't your career ruined in the same way?" said Edmund, still in the hoarse unnatural voice in which his confession had been made.

"You have your wife to think of; I have none."

"She is as anxious as I am that some atonement should be made to you for all you have suffered. She urged me before I came out to write a letter to the papers, and tell the whole story, including her own regret for what she had said at the trial. I told her," hesitating a little, "that I did not think you would desire that; as far, at least, as she was concerned."

"Great heavens! no. I never heard of such an extraordinary proposition."

"It would make a great difference to you. That is why I came to say it. I owe you something: I am willing to—to pay. I will write to the *Times*."

He moved towards the door, hat and stick in hand, as if wishful to be gone; his face was averted from Frank, who tried in vain to catch his eye.

"Stop!" cried the young man. "Don't go off in such a hurry. I must think. How can one answer a thing like this all at once? Yes, I suppose it would make a difference

in public opinion. People would see that that poor fool had a grudge against me, which those idiots at the trial would not see. But do you suppose I can let you do it? Tut, let sleeping dogs lie. The matter is half forgotten already; why rake it up again?"

"Fiat justitia," muttered Edmund, with his hand on the door.

"The heavens shall not fall for me," said Frank, loudly. "No; for your wife's sake, Creighton, for Alys's sake, the thing shall not be done."

"She wishes it; she thinks it right."

"I don't know. It's right as far as you are concerned, you are right to be willing to do it. It would not be right for me to accept the sacrifice. You have come to me. I accept that as sufficient atonement; I want no more. Come back, Creighton, come back and shake hands over it, and let us both hold our tongues."

The colour had risen again to Edmund's cheek.

"Your generosity shames me," he said; and although he relinquished his hold upon the door, he stood still, with his eyes cast down. "I have wronged you in every way," he said, with the stiff reluctant manner of one who forces words out of himself against the grain; "and—I have regretted it ever since."

"Say no more about it," said Frank. "The best way is to think of the matter as it affects her. You must be silent —as I shall be—for her sake."

Edmund paused for a moment, then walked back to the bedside and took the offered hand, saying deliberately—

"Apology is a poor word. I came to ask your pardon, and did not know how to say it. I say it now."

"We are friends from this moment. Don't think of it again. Only tell me one thing—was it simply this accident of mine that made you resolve to tell me—and the world?"

Edmund knitted his brows, and looked as if he did not want to reply. But there was something in Frank's sympathetic personality which impelled even Edmund Creighton

to confidence. He looked into the listening dark eyes as he spoke.

"There is an old story," he said, in a hesitating, rather shamefaced way, "of the ring of Polycrates—you know it?"

"The man who cast his ring into the sea that he might propitiate the gods. I know Schiller's poem as well as the classic. Go on. I don't see."

"It was a superstitious fancy that haunted me. I thought that if I made the sacrifice . . . the gods would let me go free. Perhaps they may."

"Upon my word I don't understand."

"It is silly fancy," said Edmund, moving away. "My wife is ill—the doctors fear that she may not recover; or that if she recovers her mind may be affected. It seems a silly enough notion that the wrath of the gods should be averted by any sacrifice of ours, does it not? Yet I have wished many a time that I could believe it—or that I lived in a day when any sacrifice could avail."

Frank scarcely grasped the sense of these latter words. He was struck with dismay.

"Is she so ill?" he said in a low tone.

"She may get better," Edmund answered, passing his hand over his eyes; and then throwing back his head as if to avert a premonition of evil, "and that is why I am taking her abroad. Change of air—change of scene—is what the doctors say she wants. And peace of mind."

They said no more; for at that moment, the nurse appeared to say that the interview had lasted long enough. But they parted on friendly terms, as Frank had never thought to part with the man who had injured him. It was long before he could forget what Edmund had told him, or put away the thought of Alys, ill and, perhaps, unhappy, going away from England to suffer,—perhaps—for who could tell?—to die.

Lisbeth wondered a little at his silence concerning the interview. He told her nothing; he could not bear to repeat what Edmund had said to him. Besides, he thought that it might give her pain. So the day came when he said

farewell to her, and was carried north in an invalid-carriage, with his mother triumphant at his side.

"You live near them, don't you?" said the nurse who had spoken to Lisbeth before about her marvellous influence over the patient's nerves.

"Yes, quite near."

"Are you going home soon?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Because they will want you soon," said the nurse, with a significant smile.

"Want me?" said Lisbeth, drawing back.

"Yes, want you, Miss Verrall. That good lady will fidget him to death."

"But Nurse Emma went with him too."

"And if she's wise she will tell Lady Adela Moor to send for you. You can quiet him when no one else can. And he's not out of the wood yet. I should be very much afraid of a relapse—but she would hurry him away."

"I am not going back for some time," said Lisbeth; "and even if I were at home, it is not at all likely that Lady Adela would want me. I may never see them again."

She spoke in rather a quelling tone; and the nurse, although she smiled a superior smile, said nothing more. And then Lisbeth, feeling strangely dull and quiescent, went back to Campden Hill, and helped to pack Alys's boxes for her departure with Edmund to a German spa. They had asked Lisbeth to accompany them, but she had refused. She had seen enough of Edmund to be sure that it would be better for the two to be together. Besides, her heart once more yearned for Quest. She longed for the free mountain air, the moorland breezes, the untrammelled life of the farm. And there was attraction in the thought that she would, at least, be near Moor End; that she might some day see Frank as he drove in his carriage and she walked by the wayside; that at any rate she might hear of him, and know how he was getting on.

So back she went to Quest, and had a lonely time of it. As she had expected, Lady Adela took no notice of her

existence. She saw nothing of Frank, and the nurse seemed to have been sent away. Now and then rumours reached her ears—rumours that Mr. Moor was very ill, or that he did not get on well with his mother, who nagged him to death: and so on. She tried to shut her ears to them, but in spite of her resolution, they worried and annoyed her, and the impossibility of getting at the truth hurt her more than all.

She had been at home more than a month, when one day she was amazed to see Lady Adela at her door. She had driven up in a pony-cart, and was tearful and hot and embarrassed all at once. She almost fell at Lisbeth's feet, when the mistress of Quest met her at the door.

"Oh, Lisbeth," she said, "will you come to him? He will be better if you come."

"Is he ill?" asked Lisbeth, with white lips.

"Yes; he is ill and he wants you. I sometimes think that if anybody can make him better it is you. And oh, Lisbeth, tell him—make him understand—that it is only my love for him which makes me so anxious and so fidgetty, and all that I care for is his happiness. You can make him do anything, Lisbeth. I give him up to you, if only you will come to Moor End with me."

And Lisbeth went.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TOO LATE.

THE German watering place to which Edmund Creighton had been recommended to take his wife was a pretty little town, set on the borders of a silver lake, and edged by beautifully wooded hills. The scenery was charming, the climate delightful, the company select. Edmund took a suite of apartments in the best hotel, and devoted himself to the service of his wife, but not with such good results as he had anticipated. He came to her one afternoon, as she re-

clined on a couch in the verandah, a spot from which a lovely view of the hill and lake could be obtained. The verandah itself was cool and in shadow; but the landscape was bright with sunshine, and the scent of exquisite flowers was wafted to the nostrils from the garden, which stretched for some distance before the house.

But Alys was not looking at the prospect, nor did she seem to be enjoying the sunshine and the flowers. She lay huddled into a corner of the wide couch, her white drapery closely wrapped round her, and her eye fixed with a curious intensity upon her hand. Even when Edmund drew quite close to her, and laying his hand upon the couch, stood looking down on her, she made no response.

"I have brought you some flowers, dearest," he said at last.

Then she stirred and looked up. He showed her the bunch of magnificent roses that he held, and placed it gently in her lap; but she only uttered a languid word of thanks, and showed no sign of pleasure.

He sighed as he drew a chair close to the couch, and seated himself. She looked very fair, but very frail, he thought, in the clear summer daylight. Her face seemed to have grown smaller, and the golden hair that strayed about her forehead gave her a childish look. There was little colour in her face; even her parted lips were pale, and the dark shadows round her blue eyes made them look large and almost ghastly.

Strangers, on seeing her for the first time, generally exclaimed, "How ill she looks!" but the worst of it, in Edmund's opinion, was, that she was not ill. That is, she had no definite disease. There was a gradual wasting away,—a decline of strength; and that was all.

The one obscure symptom that puzzled all the doctors was a certain confusion of thought and ideas, which sometimes made itself manifest. She did strange things sometimes; she did strange things, which made Edmund's heart contract with a pang of fear. The best construction that could be put upon them was that they came simply from

physical weakness; and that if her general health improved, her brain would also recover tone. There seemed no reason, the doctors said, why she should not get well and strong. Only she did not do it, and nobody could quite tell why.

"Would you like to go for a drive this afternoon, Alys?"

"No, thank you."

The tone was perfectly apathetic. "Have you been out to-day at all? I should like to take you for a sail on the lake."

She made him no answer.

"Shall I order a boat, dear?"

"No, thank you."

"Are you not tired of lying here and doing nothing?"

"No."

"Alys—Alys, why won't you rouse yourself and try to get well?"

The cry came from his very heart. He loved her passionately, and had hoped to teach her to love him in return. For a few days in London, after their great reconciliation, and after Edmund had made the confession to Frank Moor, upon which she had insisted, he thought that he had achieved his end; but when Lisbeth went away, she began to droop, and become daily more cold and indifferent, as well as weaker in health. It seemed sometimes to him as if she did not care to live.

She looked up with a kind of wonder, and then the blue eyes filled with tears. "I do try," she whispered, "but I can't. It's no use."

"Darling, don't cry. I did not speak crossly, did I? It is only that I can't bear to see you looking so weak and ill, and caring for nothing or nobody."

The faintest glimmer of a smile crossed her wan face. "I do care for you," she said, softly.

"Do you, darling? Do you really?"

"Oh, yes," she said, suddenly sinking back into indifference, and closing her eyes. "But I am so tired."

That was always the way. When he had succeeded even in rousing her attention, he could not keep it for more than a minute or two. There seemed to be no getting any grip over her mind. He sat and watched her in speechless tribulation. What could he do? All his efforts seemed fruitless, and yet he felt himself compelled to try again.

"Alys, love, would you like me to send for Lisbeth?"

"No," she said, listlessly. "Lisbeth is busy; she told me so."

"I don't think she is too busy to come to you."

"Oh, yes, she is; she is staying at Moor End. I had a letter from her last week."

"I am glad of that," said Edmund, encouraging her to talk. "And what news did she give you?"

"Oh, none in particular."

"Was Mr. Moor better?" asked her husband, somewhat incautiously.

"I don't know." She turned her head away and closed her eyes. He saw his mistake; the very mention of Frank's name had stirred a train of painful thoughts, and she could not easily shake them off.

"I think we might ask Julian to come and see us," he said, trying to divert her mind.

She did not answer. She was again looking at her hand.

"What is the matter?" he said, gently. "What are you looking at, dear?"

She raised her blue eyes plaintively to his face. "It is my hand," she said, in a low, complaining voice. "Don't you see it? Do you think I shall ever get it off?"

"Get *what* off?"

"The stain. Don't you see it—a great red stain. It has been there ever since I killed my child."

Edmund's blood ran cold. He had never heard her speak in this way before. Evidently there was some fixed delusion in her mind. He remembered now how often he had seen her wearing gloves. He looked as she bade him, at the little wasted hand, and it was white as snow.

"There is nothing on your hand, darling," he said.

"Oh, yes, there is, Edmund; you must have noticed it. It came when I was ill. At first I only saw it now and then, but since we came here it has grown and grown, and I am so afraid that people will remark it and ask what I have done."

"Alys, my sweet, how can there be?"

"Why, you told me so yourself," she said, looking at him with the clear, collected gaze of one who was perfectly aware of what she was saying, and able to judge correctly of the propriety of her idea. "You first made me expect to see it—long before it came. Don't you remember what you said?"

"I do not know what you mean, dear."

"It was at Quest," said Alys, still in the same tone of gentle argument, "and we were talking about poor Frank Moor. I wanted to give him up because I was afraid of him, but I was not sure whether I was doing right, and you asked me how I could marry a man with blood on his hands. That was because he had accidentally killed Zadock Verrall, you know. Well, it is just the same with me. Ever since baby died, I have had this stain of blood on my hands."

Was it any use to remonstrate? With a qualm of agony, Edmund tried the experiment.

"You must know, dear Alys, that I spoke figuratively. Frank Moor had no stain of blood on his hands, in your sense of the words; neither have you."

"But you said he had," returned Alys, with mild persistence, "and I see it myself. It is one of those things that cannot be hid."

"Why don't you wash it off, then?" he said, trying to humour the fancy. "Get some water. I will ring for some hot water and wash your hands for you. Shall I carry you in?"

She agreed to this proposal with some apparent pleasure; and Edmund carried her into the little sitting-room which opened on the verandah, and rang the bell for some hot water.

"Do you think it will come off?" she asked, with the simplicity of a child.

"Of course it will, dear. You shall see," he answered, trying to speak cheerily, and in the most unconcerned fashion in the world, while he felt as if his heart would break.

Presently, a maid brought the hot water, soap, and a towel. She did not look surprised. She had heard something of the English lady's vagaries before this time. Edmund fancied he caught a glance of pity from her eye, and dismissed her summarily from the room. Pity for himself and Alys he could not bear.

He knelt down beside her, and did as she bade him—sponged and rubbed the delicate little hands and dried them on the soft towel, and rubbed them again. But, as he might have known, it was all of no use. As soon as the hand was dry, Alys would utter a subdued cry, and say—

"Ah, it is no use. See, the stain is coming back. It is worse than ever. You will never wash it off." And, at last, the tears filled her eyes, and fell from them like rain.

Then Edmund's self-possession gave way, as it had never done since he had attained the days of manhood. He laid his head down on Alys's lap, and sobbed aloud with a passion of grief and love. And then she put her hand softly on his hair, and seemed to come to herself.

"What is it, Edmund? Oh, Edmund, don't. What is the matter?" she said.

But all the reply he could make was to take the little hand and cover it with kisses—alas, alas! with tears. All remembrance of what she had said seemed to have faded from his mind. He had to invent some story of sudden illness to account for his emotion, before she could be pacified.

But this incident left him a different man. He was one upon whom a great blow was falling, and every day he expected it to come. He saw that the doctors' worst prognostications were being verified. The mental shock caused by the child's death, following on the strain of Frank's trial, and all that the trial signified, had been too much for her.

He might as well take her back to England at once—to some quiet place, where they would be beyond the reach of prying eyes and slanderous tongues.

He began to make arrangements for the return. It was only retarded by the arrival of a letter from Julian, who wrote to say that she and her husband were travelling in that direction, and would join her brother and his wife upon the morrow.

Edmund went to the station. Julian exclaimed, at the sight of him,—

"Edmund, how ill you look!" and was surprised and abashed to find that he did not smile in reply.

They entered the open carriage that was in waiting; and then the young man turned to his sister, and tried to explain.

"You will find Alys very much changed," he said abruptly. "I am glad you have come. But you ought to be prepared."

"Prepared for what?" said Lady Raynflete, half frightened by his melancholy look.

"She is ill. If I had had time I would have written. It is an illness of the mind rather than of the body. The death of the child——"

He broke off, and said no more. Julian and her husband exchanged glances of mute consternation. Edmund was utterly unlike himself. And even yet they were not thoroughly prepared.

When Julian had paid her first visit to Alys, Lord Raynflete found her weeping in her own room.

"Oh John," she said, "it is terrible."

"Is she so ill?"

"She looks very ill. But it is not that; she is quite placid and indifferent, but she seems like a child. I am afraid that her mind is gone."

"Poor thing, she has had a great deal of trouble."

"And she has a mania," said Julian, lowering her voice. "She is always wanting to wash her hands—to get the stain off, she says. There must be a reminiscence of Lady Mac-

beth, I suppose; and then Edmund said something, before they were married, about Frank Moor's hands being stained; and she has never forgotten it. To see any one so gentle and innocent as Alys accusing herself of a crime, when it was all pure accident, is terrible to me."

But Julian did not express another thought that was in her mind. She had always considered in the old days, that Alys had shown great want of faith in Francis Moor; she had put the worst construction on his actions; and yet this fate had overtaken her, that she also should take another's life, and be pursued by remorse for what was, after all, pure accident. Now she understood the hopeless look in Edmund's face.

"You have seen her," the brother said later in the day; "and what do you think?"

Julian's starting tears alone replied.

"You think there is no chance?" he said.

"Edmund, dear Edmund, I do not know; how can I tell? What do the doctors say?"

"Only what I know already. There is one comfort—it cannot last very long."

"Perhaps that may be—best," said Julian, with an effort.

"Yes, best—for her, Julian; the worst is—I can say it to you—that I feel I drove her to this pass."

"You, Edmund?"

"I argued her out of her own judgment. I made her think Frank Moor more guilty than he was. You see how what I said sank into her mind. What right had I to say that his hands were stained with blood? She will never let me forget that phrase of mine."

"You thought so; it was not your fault."

"Nay, I did not think so," said Edmund, with a bitter smile; "I lied if I said I thought so; and now my sin has found me out."

He had planned to make the journey to England as soon as possible; but it was evident to all that Alys would not be able to go. She was growing weaker every day. The

doctor at last intimated plainly that he might as well give up his design. She would never leave the place alive.

After the decision, nothing remained but to stay quietly, and watch her fading away, like a flower with a broken stem. Edmund scarcely ever left her. Julian tried to relieve his watch, but he could not bear to be away from the sick room more than a few minutes at a time. Then came a transient gleam of hope. She seemed better; she had more colour, and took more interest in the things around her. For a little while even Edmund hoped that things were after all not so bad as they seemed.

He was sitting with her one evening, when he observed that she was looking wistfully at him, as if she wanted to speak. He leaned forward and re-arranged the cushions at her back. She was not in bed, for the weather was hot and close, and she had seemed more comfortable on a sofa near the window. He bent forward to kiss her very gently, when he had put the cushion right; and to his infinite surprise and poignant pleasure, she lifted her face to return his kiss. She had not done this for many a long day.

"I have been ill, have I not?" she said.

"Yes, my darling, very ill."

"And you have brought me here to get better. What a pretty place!"

She spoke as if she had never seen it before.

"And what did you do with baby when you brought me here?"

Had she forgotten all that had happened? Edmund's eyes drooped; but he answered steadily, "She is at home."

"And well?"

"Quite well."

"Oh, I am glad. I have had horrible dreams. . . . Edmund, tell me they were not true."

"No, darling, they were not true."

Her head sank on his shoulder. "I am so glad," she said, with a sigh of relief. And then she did not speak for some little time. But presently she lifted up her face.

"Edmund," she whispered, "was there not a mark—a stain —upon my hand ?"

Oh, that old delusion, how it wrung his very heart! But love gave him strength to make a firm reply. "No, dearest, none."

"I thought not," she answered, with a long drawn breath. "There used to be, you know; but it is all—washed —clean."

And she laid down her weary head in a slumber, from which she never woke again.

CHAPTER XL.

FAREWELL TO QUEST.

When Lady Adela bore off Lisbeth in triumph to Moor End, she had come to the very end of her resources. The nurse had been dismissed rather too soon, as it turned out; and Frank was still in an exceedingly delicate state of health. But Lady Adela was quite incompetent to manage him. He had grown impatient of enforced inaction, and was resolved to exert himself as much as possible. The consequence was that he had brought on an attack of fever which he absolutely refused to nurse, although the doctor warned him that the result of neglect might be serious. He was ill enough to be very fractious and totally unmanageable, and therefore Lady Adela had flown to Lisbeth for assistance.

But it was curious to see how Frank's unreasonableness vanished in the charm of Lisbeth's presence. He was submissive to her, when he defied every one else; and in half an hour after her arrival, he had gone peaceably to bed, and was undergoing all the treatment which he had previously scouted. He had taken a severe chill, and there was danger of pneumonia; but Lisbeth was an excellent nurse. She scolded him, to be sure, when he did imprudent things; but

she had not to scold him very often. He was so delighted to see her again that he professed entire obedience to her commands.

"How did my mother get you here?" he said one morning, as he watched her sitting with her needlework at the window, and admired the beauty of her profile.

"How! by asking me to come."

"But why had you not come before?"

Lisbeth gave him a glance of surprise, and coloured, in some confusion. She did not like to say to him that she had once been asked to stop away.

"Were you offended with us, Lisbeth?"

"Not at all."

"Then why have you avoided us ever since we came back to Moor End?"

"I had a reason," said Lisbeth, decisively; "but it is not worth telling, and I don't mean to tell it. So don't ask me any more."

He did not ask her, but he grew very thoughtful, as he watched her at her work.

Next he attacked his mother, when she was alone with him, and Lisbeth had gone out for a walk. Lady Adela was a good deal subdued in his presence, for she felt that she had mismanaged him, and was disposed to be apologetic.

"Mother, I have been asking Lisbeth why she did not come and see us after she came back to Quest."

"I suppose she was too busy," said Lady Adela, trying not to look embarrassed.

"I don't think that was it. Perhaps she thought she was not welcome."

Lady Adela was not a good dissembler. She dropped something with a clatter, and had to search for it a good deal with her half-blind eyes before she could find it again. Meanwhile, Frank watched her with an odd expression on his face.

"I suppose, mother," he said, when at last peace was restored, "that you never gave her reason to suppose that we did not want her here?"

"Well, really, Frank, I cannot always remember exactly what I said. Perhaps I did remark once that I wanted to see as much of you as possible—wanted to keep you to myself, or something of that sort. But I had no idea that she would take offence."

Frank asked no more questions, to his mother's infinite relief. But the fact was that he had extracted all the information he wanted, and meant to act upon it.

"Lisbeth," he said, when next he had an opportunity of speaking without being overheard by any one else, "I have found out why you would not come to Moor End."

"Have you, Mr. Frank?"

"You always call me 'Mr. Frank' when you want to vex me. But I am not going to take any notice. I find that my mother, in her mistaken solicitude for me, wanted to keep me all to herself. She has acknowledged as much to me. She was very polite to wish to cut me off from all our old friends. Remember, Lisbeth, that you are to take no notice of what she said, then, but to be as friendly as you can."

"I don't think I am wanting in friendliness, am I?" said Lisbeth, with a smile.

"You show a pretty good imitation of it," said Frank contentedly. "I only hope it is genuine."

And then they laughed together; and it seemed like music in Lisbeth's ears when she heard his laugh.

Indeed, he was growing quite cheerful; and both mother and nurse noted the change in him with joy. Moreover, it was quite evident that his neighbours were prepared to receive him in the friendliest manner, and utterly to ignore the past. It was generally felt that he had been treated hardly, and that amends ought to be made to him; and the county people called in shoals, and welcomed him back to the fells, with a general air of having understood that he had been on a voyage or a hunting expedition, or something of that kind, and that they were pleased at his having reached home safe and sound. In spite of his occasional doubts and suspicions, Frank found this treatment soothing.

But in the midst of this cheering and remedial process,

came the news of Alys Creighton's illness and death. Not till long afterwards did Frank hear the details of those sad latter days of hers; but the fact of her death was sufficient to depress him and to throw him back for a considerable time. Even Lisbeth—herself full of sorrow—could not cheer him now; and when he was able to do without her, she was allowed to go back to Quest, where she occupied herself with winding up her affairs, and arranging to sell the farm.

But this operation took time, and months passed before it was concluded. She said nothing about her plans to Lady Adela and Frank, although she saw them with tolerable frequency. In fact, she took a great deal of pains to prevent her intentions from coming to their ears. It was not until the following May that Frank heard that the farm was actually sold, and that she was going away.

He rode over to Quest as soon as he heard the news, and found her in the garden, tying up plants and otherwise making herself busy. The two looked at each other for a moment or two in the pleasant sunshine, and thought that the air of Crosthwaite was good for man and woman alike. And, indeed, the thought was justifiable, for they were a goodly pair.

Frank had filled out since his illness, and looked older and graver than his years. He was tanned by sun and wind; he had also lost the delicate look which had characterised him in days of old, and was the handsomer for its loss. Lisbeth had blossomed out into fuller beauty, although her face was thoughtful, and her eyes a little sad when her face was in repose. They gleamed brightly now, however, as she looked up at Frank.

His words were hurried, and his manner eager, when he spoke.

"Lisbeth, can it be true? Are you going away from Quest?"

"Yes," she answered; and her eyes fell, and the colour came into her cheeks.

"Have you actually sold the place?"

"I have."

"Who is the purchaser, may I ask?"

"Lord Raynflete."

"Then I suppose you have got a fair price. But why did you do it without any reference to us? Do you think it was kind? Did you think we had no regard for you, or what you meant to do? Lisbeth, you were inconsiderate of your friends."

"I did not mean to be so," she answered, pressing her hands nervously together. "I only thought that you would, perhaps—in your kindness—urge me to stay; and I cannot tell you how monotonous, how painful even, this life at Quest has become to me. I am only too glad to think of leaving it behind."

"And pray, what do you mean to do?"

"I am going to London," said Lisbeth, slowly. "I am going to become a hospital nurse."

"You!"

"Yes; why not? Don't you think I shall make a good one?"

"You are a good one already. Why should you go and waste your time in drudgery?"

"If that is drudgery, I think I like drudgery. You are a man, you have your mother—and other interests—and you do not know how much a woman feels her loneliness. Here at Quest—with the winds sighing round the house, and the rain beating against the window-panes—oh, you don't know what it is like when one is quite alone."

"Poor Lisbeth! And you have never spoken of all this."

"Not as long as it had to be borne. There is no use in complaining of the inevitable. But I have got rid of Quest at last. And yet I love the place."

She looked round her with a glance which was full of unutterable yearning and affection. Every stick and stone was dear to her, although she had resolved to leave them all. The outlines of the hills were stamped upon her very soul. And Frank was the only person in the world who understood.

"You will be miserable in London, Lisbeth," he said, gently. "Why should you go there—of all places?"

"I must go where there is work to do. I cannot be idle."

"But you might find work here."

She shook her head. "There is nothing for me to do. Nobody wants me. In London I can at any rate be of use."

"How can you say that nobody wants you here? You know it is untrue."

"I know nothing of the kind," she answered shortly; and turned her back to him on the pretext of tying one of her plants to a stick. He stood silent, frowning and biting hard at his brown moustache.

"Shall you never come back?" he asked in a lower voice.

"Oh, yes, sometimes. Lord Raynflete is to put in a respectable man and woman who will let me lodge here if I like, from time to time. I shall be glad to come back now and then, when I am tired."

"I don't believe it," said Frank, almost rudely. "You will never come back, when once you have gone away."

She turned round and looked at him in surprise.

"Because," he said, speaking between set teeth, as if repressing some emotion, "you do not care for any of us. You are going away because you do not care."

"I do care," she cried, darting a defiant glance at him.

"Then if you care, why do you not stay? Lisbeth, stay with me."

He had said it now—said what had been in his heart for many a long day, but which he had never dreamed of uttering to her. She heard it, and turned pale. Indeed, she staggered as if she had received a blow. Once she had dreamt of his love indeed; but that was so very long ago.

"Lisbeth, will you not answer me? I have told you the truth now. I love you, as I never loved any woman—not even Alys—as I love you. I said once that I would never ask any woman to be my wife, but I take back the word. I ask you—you, Lisbeth, dearest and best of women, to be my wife."

"I have heard," said Lisbeth, falteringly, "that you cared for another—that there was a Miss Harrington."

"It's a lie. I never thought of Miss Harrington."

"And then there is Alys. She is dead, but——"

"I do not forget her. I loved her—yes; but I love you, Lisbeth, better."

"Lady Adela——"

"Never mind Lady Adela. The question lies between you and me. Everything else can settle itself afterwards. Lisbeth, can you tell me that you do not care for me at all?"

"N—no," she said, faintly; "I cannot quite say that."

"Say the truth, then. You love me?"

"A little."

"How little? How much? Lisbeth, will you be my wife?"

She blushed more deeply than he had ever seen her blush before; then, without answering, she walked slowly towards the house. Probably she did not quite know what she was doing; but she sought the house with an instinctive desire for shelter. He followed her, doubtingly, hesitatingly, until she faced him in the little parlour where they had so often met before. Then, seeing something in her face that gave him courage, he simply took her in his arms, and kissed her on the lips.

There was no talk after this of her going to London to become a hospital nurse. Frank would not hear a word of it. And in his new triumph, he had become so masterful, so dictatorial, that Lisbeth hardly knew him, and abdicated her old habits of command, unconditionally. It was something new to her even to make a pretence of obeying.

"And now tell me the truth," he said to her, solemnly enough, "how long is it since you learned to care for me a little bit?"

She blushed hotly. But Frank received an answer which he did not expect. "All my life, I think," she said.

"All your life!—yes, as a sister; but with this kind of love?"

"Ever since I knew what love meant."

"What, when you refused me and scolded me?"

"It was because I loved you all the time."

Frank was silent. His mind flew back over the intevening spaces, and he thought of the days when he had neglected Lisbeth for her sister's sake, and of all the pain that she must silently have endured. His heart smote him as he stooped to kiss her lips again.

"What a blind bat I have been! Forgive me, Lisbeth, I will try to atone for all I have given you to bear. I don't know how you can put up with me, nor how I found courage to tell you of my love. But since you know it, since you love me a little, I must hope that you will put up with all that is wanting in me, all that is amiss—weakness, folly, poverty, loss of my good name——"

"Nay, Frank, you have won that back already."

"You will help me, Lisbeth," he said gravely, "to win it back."

There was no opposition. Lady Adela declared herself delighted. The county people waxed enthusiastic over the marriage, which they declared to be so delightfully romantic, and deluged Lisbeth with presents. More than this, they called upon her afterwards, and said that it was no wonder Frank Moor had fallen in love with her. She soon won for herself the reputation of being the handsomest woman of the country-side.

But a reputation for beauty mattered very little to Lisbeth, when she had a husband to love, and, in later years, children of her own to tend. They occupied her thoughts, and she cared little for that outer world of which Julian told her from time to time. Her husband, her boys and girls were all the world to the quondam mistress of Quest.

THE END.

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